The Butterfly House

Mary Eleanor Wilkins Freeman

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THE BUTTERFLY HOUSE

BY

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"A Humble Romance," "A New England Nun,"
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THE BUTTERFLY HOUSE

CHAPTER I

Fairbridge, the little New Jersey village, or rather city (for it had won municipal government some years before, in spite of the protest of far-seeing citizens who descried in the distance bonded debts out of proportion to the tiny shoulders of the place), was a misnomer. Often a person, being in Fairbridge for the first time, and being driven by way of entertainment about the rural streets, would inquire, "Why Fairbridge?"

Bridges there were none, except those over which the trains thundered to and from New York, and the adjective, except to old inhabitants who had a curious fierce loyalty for the place, did not seemingly apply. Fairbridge could hardly, by an unbiassed person who did not dwell in the little village and view its features through the rosy glamour of home life, be called "fair." There were a few pretty streets, with well-kept sidewalks, and ambitious, although small houses, and there were

many lovely bits of views to be obtained, especially in the green flush of spring, and the red glow of autumn over the softly swelling New Jersey landscape with its warm red soil to the distant rise of low blue hills; but it was not fair enough in a general way to justify its name. Yet Fairbridge it was, without bridge, or natural beauty, and no mortal knew why. The origin of the name was lost in the petty mist of a petty past.

Fairbridge was tragically petty, inasmuch as it saw itself great. In Fairbridge narrowness reigned, nay, tyrannised, and was not recognised as such. There was something fairly uncanny about Fairbridge's influence upon people after they had lived there even a few years. The influence held good, too, in the cases of men who daily went to business or professions in New York. Even Wall Street was no sinecure. Back they would come at night, and the terrible, narrow maelstrom of pettiness sucked them in. All outside interest was as naught. International affairs seemed insignificant when once one was really in Fairbridge.

Fairbridge, although rampant when local

politics were concerned, had no regard whatever for those of the nation at large, except as they involved Fairbridge. Fairbridge, to its own understanding, was a nucleus, an ultimatum. It was an example of the triumph of the infinitesimal. It saw itself through a microscope and loomed up gigantic. Fairbridge was like an insect, born with the conviction that it was an elephant. There was at once something ludicrous, and magnificent, and terrible about it. It had the impressiveness of the abnormal and prehistoric. In one sense, it *was* prehistoric. It was as a giant survivor of a degenerate species.

Withal, it was puzzling. People if pinned down could not say why, in Fairbridge, the little was so monstrous, whether it depended upon local conditions, upon the general population, or upon a few who had an undue estimation of themselves and all connected with them. Was Fairbridge great because of its inhabitants, or were the inhabitants great because of Fairbridge? Who could say? And why was Fairbridge so important that its very smallness overwhelmed that which, by the nature of

things, seemed overwhelming? Nobody knew, or rather, so tremendous was the power of the small in the village, that nobody inquired.

It is entirely possible that had there been any delicate gauge of mentality, the actual swelling of the individual in his own estimation as he neared Fairbridge after a few hours' absence, might have been apparent. Take a broker on Wall Street, for instance, or a lawyer who had threaded his painful way to the dim light of understanding through the intricate mazes of the law all day, as his train neared his loved village. From an atom that went to make up the motive power of a great metropolis, he himself became an entirety. He was It with a capital letter. No wonder that under the circumstances Fairbridge had charms that allured, that people chose it for suburban residences, that the small, ornate, new houses with their perky little towers and æsthetic diamond-paned windows, multiplied.

Fairbridge was in reality very artistically planned as to the sites of its houses. Instead of the regulation Main Street of the country village, with its centre given up to shops and

post-office, side streets wound here and there, and houses were placed with a view to effect.

The Main Street of Fairbridge was as naught from a social point of view. Nobody of any social importance lived there. Even the physicians had their residences and offices in a more aristocratic locality. Upon the Main Street proper, that which formed the centre of the village, there were only shops and a schoolhouse and one or two mean public buildings. For a village of the self-importance of Fairbridge, the public buildings were very few and very mean. There was no city hall worthy of the name of this little city which held its head so high. The City Hall, so designated by ornate gilt letters upon the glass panel of a very small door, occupied part of the building in which was the post-office. It was a tiny building, two stories high. On the second floor was the millinery shop of Mrs. Creevy, and behind it the two rooms in which she kept house with her daughter Jessy.

On the lower floor was the post-office on the right, filthy with the foot tracks of the Fairbridge children who crowded it in a noisy rab-

ble twice a day, and perpetually red-stained with the shale of New Jersey, brought in upon the boots of New Jersey farmers, who always bore about with them a goodly portion of their native soil. On the left, was the City Hall. This was vacant except upon the first Monday of every month, when the janitor of the Dutch Reformed Church, who eked out a scanty salary with divers other tasks, got himself to work, and slopped pails of water over the floor, then swept, and built a fire, if in winter.

Upon the evenings of these first Mondays the Mayor and city officials met and made great talk over small matters, and with the labouring of a mountain, brought forth mice. The City Hall was closed upon other occasions, unless the village talent gave a play for some local benefit. Fairbridge was intensely dramatic, and it was popularly considered that great, natural, histrionic gifts were squandered upon the Fairbridge audiences, appreciative though they were. Outside talent was never in evidence in Fairbridge. No theatrical company had ever essayed to rent that City Hall. People in Fairbridge put that somewhat humili-

ating fact from their minds. Nothing would have induced a loyal citizen to admit that Fairbridge was too small game for such purposes. There was a tiny theatre in the neighbouring city of Axminister, which had really some claims to being called a city, from tradition and usage, aside from size. Axminister was an ancient Dutch city, horribly uncomfortable, but exceedingly picturesque. Fairbridge looked down upon it, and seldom patronised the shows (they never said "plays") staged in its miniature theatre. When they did not resort to their own City Hall for entertainment by local talent, they arrayed themselves in their best and patronised New York itself.

New York did not know that it was patronised, but Fairbridge knew. When Mr. and Mrs. George B. Slade boarded the seven o'clock train, Mrs. Slade, tall, and majestically handsome, arrayed most elegantly, and crowned with a white hat (Mrs. Slade always affected white hats with long drooping plumes upon such occasions), and George B., natty in his light top coat, standing well back upon the heels of his shiny shoes, with the air of the

wealthy and well-assured, holding a belted cigar in the tips of his grey-gloved fingers, New York was most distinctly patronised, although without knowing it.

It was also patronised, and to a greater extent, by little Mrs. Wilbur Edes, very little indeed, so little as to be almost symbolic of Fairbridge itself, but elegant in every detail, so elegant as to arrest the eye of everybody as she entered the train, holding up the tail of her black lace gown. Mrs. Edes doted on black lace. Her small, fair face peered with a curious calm alertness from under the black plumes of her great picture hat, perched sidewise upon a carefully waved pale gold pompadour, which was perfection and would have done credit to the best hairdresser or the best French maid in New York, but which was achieved solely by Mrs. Wilbur Edes' own native wit and skilful fingers.

Mrs. Wilbur Edes, although small, was masterly in everything, from waving a pompadour to conducting theatricals. She herself was the star dramatic performer of Fairbridge. There was a strong feeling in Fairbridge that

in reality she might, if she chose, rival Bernhardt. Mrs. Emerston Strong, who had been abroad and had seen Bernhardt on her native soil, had often said that Mrs. Edes reminded her of the great French actress, although she was much handsomer, and so moral! Mrs. Wilbur Edes was masterly in morals, as in everything else. She was much admired by the opposite sex, but she was a model wife and mother.

Mr. Wilbur Edes was an admired accessory of his wife. He was so very tall and slender as to suggest forcible elongation. He carried his head with a deprecatory, sidewise air as if in accordance with his wife's picture hat, and yet Mr. Wilbur Edes, out of Fairbridge and in his law office on Broadway, was a man among men. He was an exception to the personal esteem which usually expanded a male citizen of Fairbridge, but he was the one and only husband of Mrs. Wilbur Edes, and there was not room at such an apex as she occupied for more than one. Tall as Wilbur Edes was, he was overshadowed by that immaculate blond pompadour and that plumed picture hat. He

was a prime favourite in Fairbridge society; he was liked and admired, but his radiance was reflected, and he was satisfied that it should be so. He adored his wife. The shadow of her black picture hat was his place of perfect content. He watched the admiring glances of other men at his wonderful possession with a triumph and pride which made him really rather a noble sort. He was also so fond and proud of his little twin daughters, Maida and Adelaide, that the fondness and pride fairly illuminated his inner self. Wilbur Edes was a clever lawyer, but love made him something bigger. It caused him to immolate self, which is spiritually enlarging self.

In one respect Wilbur Edes was the biggest man in Fairbridge; in another, Doctor Sturtevant was. Doctor Sturtevant depended upon no other person for his glory. He shone as a fixed star, with his own lustre. He was esteemed a very great physician indeed, and it was considered that Mrs. Sturtevant, who was good, and honest, and portly with a tight, middle-aged portliness, hardly lived up to her husband. It was admitted that she tried, poor

soul, but her limitations were held to be impossible, even by her faithful straining following of love.

When the splendid, florid Doctor, with his majestically curving expanse of waistcoat and his inscrutable face, whirred through the streets of Fairbridge in his motor car, with that meek bulk of womanhood beside him, many said quite openly how unfortunate it was that Doctor Sturtevant had married, when so young, a woman so manifestly his inferior. They never failed to confer that faint praise, which is worse than none at all, upon the poor soul.

"She is a good woman," they said. "She means well, and she is a good housekeeper, but she is no companion for a man like that."

Poor Mrs. Sturtevant was aware of her status in Fairbridge, and she was not without a steady, plodding ambition of her own. That utterly commonplace, middle-aged face had some lines of strength. Mrs. Sturtevant was a member of the women's club of Fairbridge, which was poetically and cleverly called the Zenith Club.

She wrote, whenever it was her turn to do so, papers upon every imaginable subject. She balked at nothing whatever. She ranged from household discussions to the Orient. Then she stood up in the midst of the women, sunk her double chin in her lace collar, and read her paper in a voice like the whisper of a blade of grass. Doctor Sturtevant had a very low voice. His wife had naturally a strident one, but she essayed to follow him in the matter of voice, as in all other things. The poor hen bird tried to voice her thoughts like her mate, and the result was a strange and weird note. However, Mrs. Sturtevant herself was not aware of the result. When she sat down after finishing her papers her face was always becomingly flushed with pleasure.

Nothing, not even pleasure, was becoming to Mrs. Sturtevant. Life itself was unbecoming to her, and the worst of it was nobody knew it, and everybody said it was due to Mrs. Sturtevant's lack of taste, and then they pitied the great doctor anew. It was very fortunate that it never occurred to Mrs. Sturtevant to pity the doctor on her account, for she was so fond

of him, poor soul, that it might have led to a tragedy.

The Zenith Club of Fairbridge always met on Friday afternoons. It was a cherished aim of the Club to uproot foolish superstitions, hence Friday. It did not seem in the least risky to the ordinary person for a woman to attend a meeting of the Zenith Club on a Friday, in preference to any other day in the week; but many a member had a covert feeling that she was somewhat heroic, especially if the meeting was held at the home of some distant member on an icy day in winter, and she was obliged to make use of a livery carriage.

There were in Fairbridge three keepers of livery stables, and curiously enough, no rivalry between them. All three were natives of the soil, and somewhat sluggish in nature, like its sticky red shale. They did not move with much enthusiasm, neither were they to be easily removed. When the New York trains came in, they, with their equally indifferent drivers, sat comfortably ensconced in their carriages, and never waylaid the possible passengers alighting from the train. Sometimes they did not

even open the carriage doors, but they, however, saw to it that they were closed when once the passenger was within, and that was something. All three drove indifferent horses, somewhat uncertain as to footing. When a woman sat behind these weak-kneed, badly shod steeds and realised that Stumps, or Fitzgerald, or Witless was driving with an utter indifference to the tightening of lines at dangerous places, and also realised that it was Friday, some strength of character was doubtless required.

One Friday in January, two young women, one married, one single, one very pretty, and both well-dressed (most of the women who belonged to the Fairbridge social set dressed well) were being driven by Jim Fitzgerald a distance of a mile or more, up a long hill. The slope was gentle and languid, like nearly every slope in that part of the state, but that day it was menacing with ice. It was one smooth glaze over the macadam. Jim Fitzgerald, a descendant of a fine old family whose type had degenerated, sat hunched upon the driver's seat, his loose jaw hanging, his eyes absent,

his mouth open, chewing with slow enjoyment his beloved quid, while the reins lay slackly on the rusty black robe tucked over his knees. Even a corner of that dragged dangerously near the right wheels of the coupé. Jim had not sufficient energy to tuck it in firmly, although the wind was sharp from the northwest.

Alice Mendon paid no attention to it, but her companion, Daisy Shaw, otherwise Mrs. Sumner Shaw, who was of the tense, nervous type, had remarked it uneasily when they first started. She had rapped vigorously upon the front window, and a misty, rather beautiful blue eye had rolled interrogatively over Jim's shoulder.

"Your robe is dragging," shrieked in shrill staccato Daisy Shaw; and there had been a dull nod of the head, a feeble pull at the dragging robe, then it had dragged again.

"Oh, don't mind, dear," said Alice Mendon. "It is his own lookout if he loses the robe."

"It isn't that," responded Daisy querulously. "It isn't that. I don't care, since he is so careless, if he does lose it, but I must say that I don't think it is safe. Suppose it got

caught in the wheel, and I know this horse stumbles."

"Don't worry, dear," said Alice Mendon. "Fitzgerald's robe always drags, and nothing ever happens."

Alice Mendon was a young woman, not a young girl (she had left young girlhood behind several years since) and she was distinctly beautiful after a fashion that is not easily affected by the passing years. She had had rather an eventful life, but not an event, pleasant or otherwise, had left its mark upon the smooth oval of her face. There was not a side nor retrospective glance to disturb the serenity of her large blue eyes. Although her eyes were blue, her hair was almost chestnut black, except in certain lights, when it gave out gleams as of dark gold. Her features were full, her figure large, but not too large. She wore a dark red tailored gown; and sumptuous sable furs shaded with dusky softness and shot, in the sun, with prismatic gleams, set off her handsome, not exactly smiling, but serenely beaming face. Two great black ostrich plumes and one red one curled down toward the soft

spikes of the fur. Between, the two great blue eyes, the soft oval of the cheeks, and the pleasant red fulness of the lips appeared.

Poor Daisy Shaw, who was poor in two senses, strength of nerve and money, looked blue and cold in her little black suit, and her pale blue liberty scarf was horribly inadequate and unbecoming. Daisy was really painful to see as she gazed out apprehensively at the dragging robe, and the glistening slant over which they were moving. Alice regarded her not so much with pity as with a calm, sheltering sense of superiority and strength. She pulled the inner robe of the coupé up and tucked it firmly around Daisy's thin knees.

"You look half frozen," said Alice.

"I don't mind being frozen, but I do mind being scared," replied Daisy sharply. She removed the robe with a twitch.

"If that old horse stumbles and goes down and kicks, I want to be able to get out without being all tangled up in a robe and dragged," said she.

"While the horse is kicking and down I don't see how he can drag you very far," said Alice

with a slight laugh. Then the horse stumbled. Daisy Shaw knocked quickly on the front window with her little, nervous hand in its tight, white kid glove.

"Do please hold your reins tighter," she called. Again the misty blue eyes rolled about, the head nodded, the rotary jaws were seen, the robe dragged, the reins lay loosely.

"That wasn't a stumble worth mentioning," said Alice Mendon.

"I wish he would stop chewing and drive," said poor Daisy Shaw vehemently. "I wish we had a liveryman as good as that Dougherty in Axminister. I was making calls there the other day, and it was as slippery as it is now, and he held the reins up tight every minute. I felt safe with him."

"I don't think anything will happen."

"It does seem to me if he doesn't stop chewing, and drive, I shall fly!" said Daisy.

Alice regarded her with a little wonder. Such anxiety concerning personal safety rather puzzled her. "My horses ran away the other day, and Dick went down flat and barked his knees; that's why I have Fitzgerald to-day,"

said she. "I was not hurt. Nobody was hurt except the horse. I was very sorry about the horse."

"I wish I had an automobile," said Daisy. "You never know what a horse will do next."

Alice laughed again slightly. "There is a little doubt sometimes as to what an automobile will do next," she remarked.

"Well, it is your own brain that controls it, if you can run it yourself, as you do."

"I am not so sure. Sometimes I wonder if the automobile hasn't an uncanny sort of brain itself. Sometimes I wonder how far men can go with the invention of machinery without putting more of themselves into it than they bargain for," said Alice. Her smooth face did not contract in the least, but was brooding with speculation and thought.

Then the horse stumbled again, and Daisy screamed, and again tapped the window.

"He won't go way down," said Alice. "I think he is too stiff. Don't worry."

"There is no stumbling to worry about with an automobile," said Daisy.

"You couldn't use one on this hill without

more risk than you take with a stumbling horse," replied Alice. Just then a carriage drawn by two fine bays passed them, and there was an interchange of nods.

"There is Mrs. Sturtevant," said Alice. "She isn't using the automobile to-day."

"Doctor Sturtevant has had that coachman thirty years, and he doesn't chew, he drives," said Daisy.

Then they drew up before the house which was their destination, Mrs. George B. Slade's. The house was very small, but perkily pretentious, and they drove under the porte-cochère to alight.

"I heard Mr. Slade had been making a great deal of money in cotton lately," Daisy whispered, as the carriage stopped behind Mrs. Sturtevant's. "Mr. and Mrs. Slade went to the opera last week. I heard they had taken a box for the season, and Mrs. Slade had a new black velvet gown and a pearl necklace. I think she is almost too old to wear low neck."

"She is not so very old," replied Alice. "It is only her white hair that makes her seem so." Then she extended a rather large but well

gloved hand and opened the coupé door, while Jim Fitzgerald sat and chewed and waited, and the two young women got out. Daisy had some trouble in holding up her long skirts. She tugged at them with nervous energy, and told Alice of the twenty-five cents which Fitzgerald would ask for the return trip. She had wished to arrive at the club in fine feather, but had counted on walking home in the dusk, with her best skirts high-kilted, and saving an honest penny.

"Nonsense; of course you will go with me," said Alice in the calmly imperious way she had, and the two mounted the steps. They had scarcely reached the door before Mrs. Slade's maid, Lottie, appeared in her immaculate width of apron, with carefully-pulled-out bows and little white lace top-knot. "Upstairs, front room," she murmured, and the two went up the polished stairs. There was a landing halfway, with a diamond paned window and one rubber plant and two palms, all very glossy, and all three in nice green jardinières which exactly matched the paper on the walls of the hall. Mrs. George B. Slade had a mania for exactly

matching things. Some of her friends said among themselves that she carried it almost too far.

The front room, the guest room, into which Alice Mendon and Daisy Shaw passed, was done in yellow and white, and one felt almost sinful in disturbing the harmony by any other tint. The walls were yellow, with a frieze of garlands of yellow roses; the ceiling was tinted yellow, the tiles on the shining little hearth were yellow, every ornament upon the mantelshelf was yellow, down to a china shepherdess who wore a yellow china gown and carried a basket filled with yellow flowers, and bore a yellow crook. The bedstead was brass, and there was a counterpane of white lace over yellow, the muslin curtains were tied back with great bows of yellow ribbon. Even the pictures represented yellow flowers or maidens dressed in yellow. The rugs were yellow, the furniture upholstered in yellow, and all of exactly the same shade.

There were a number of ladies in this yellow room, prinking themselves before going downstairs. They all lived in Fairbridge; they all

knew each other; but they greeted one another with the most elegant formality. Alice assisted Daisy Shaw to remove her coat and liberty scarf, then she shook herself free of her own wraps, rather than removed them. She did not even glance at herself in the glass. Her reason for so doing was partly confidence in her own appearance, partly distrust of the glass. She had viewed herself carefully in her own looking-glass before she left home. She believed in what she had seen there, but she did not care to disturb that belief, and she saw that Mrs. Slade's mirror over her white and yellow draped dressing table stood in a cross-light. While all admitted Alice Mendon's beauty, nobody had ever suspected her of vanity; yet vanity she had, in a degree.

The other women in the room looked at her. It was always a matter of interest to Fairbridge what she would wear, and this was rather curious, as, after all, she had not many gowns. There was a certain impressiveness about her mode of wearing the same gown which seemed to create an illusion. To-day in her dark red gown embroidered with poppies of

still another shade, she created a distinctly new impression, although she had worn the same costume often before at the club meetings. She went downstairs in advance of the other women who had arrived before, and were yet anxiously peering at themselves in the cross-lighted mirror, and being adjusted as to refractory neckwear by one another.

When Alice entered Mrs. Slade's elegant little reception-room, which was done in a dull rose colour, its accessories very exactly matching, even to Mrs. Slade's own costume, which was rose silk under black lace, she was led at once to a lady richly attired in black, with gleams of jet, who was seated in a large chair in the place of honour, not quite in the bay window but exactly in the centre of the opening. The lady quite filled the chair. She was very stout. Her face, under an ornate black hat, was like a great rose full of overlapping curves of florid flesh. The wide mouth was perpetually curved into a bow of mirth, the small black eyes twinkled. She was Mrs. Sarah Joy Snyder, who had come from New York to deliver her famous lecture upon the subject: "Where

does a woman shine with more lustre, at home or abroad?''

The programme was to be varied, as usual upon such occasions, by local talent. Leila MacDonald, who sang contralto in the church choir, and Mrs. Arthur Wells, who sang soprano, and Mrs. Jack Evarts, who played the piano very well, and Miss Sally Anderson, who had taken lessons in elocution, all had their parts, besides the president of the club, Mrs. Wilbur Edes, who had a brief address in readiness, and the secretary, who had to give the club report for the year. Mrs. Snyder was to give her lecture as a grand climax, then there were to be light refreshments and a reception following the usual custom of the club.

Alice bowed before Mrs. Snyder and retreated to a window at the other side of the room. She sat beside the window and looked out. Just then one of the other liverymen drove up with a carriage full of ladies, and they emerged in a flutter of veils and silk skirts. Mrs. Slade, who was really superb in her rose silk and black lace, with an artful frill of white lace at her throat to match her great

puff of white hair, remained beside Mrs. Snyder, whose bow of mirth widened.

"Who is that magnificent creature?" whispered Mrs. Snyder with a gush of enthusiasm, indicating Alice beside the window.

"She lives here," replied Mrs. Slade rather stupidly. She did not quite know how to define Alice.

"Lives here in this little place? Not all the year?" rejoined Mrs. Snyder.

"Fairbridge is a very good place to live in all the year," replied Mrs. Slade rather stiffly. "It is near New York. We have all the advantages of a great metropolis without the drawbacks. Fairbridge is a most charming city, and very progressive, yes, very progressive."

Mrs. Slade took it rather hardly that Mrs. Snyder should intimate anything prejudicial to Fairbridge and especially that it was not good enough for Alice Mendon, who had been born there, and lived there all her life except the year she had been in college. If anything, she, Mrs. Slade, wondered if Alice Mendon were good enough for Fairbridge. What had she ever done, except to wear handsome costumes

and look handsome and self-possessed? Although she belonged to the Zenith Club, no power on earth could induce her to discharge the duties connected herewith, except to pay her part of the expenses, and open her house for a meeting. She simply would not write a paper upon any interesting and instructive topic and read it before the club, and she was not considered gifted. She could not sing like Leila MacDonald and Mrs. Arthur Wells. She could not play like Mrs. Jack Evarts. She could not recite like Sally Anderson.

Mrs. Snyder glanced across at Alice, who looked very graceful and handsome, although also, to a discerning eye, a little sulky, and bored with a curious, abstracted boredom.

"She is superb," whispered Mrs. Snyder, "yes, simply superb. Why does she live here, pray?"

"Why, she was born here," replied Mrs. Slade, again stupidly. It was as if Alice had no more motive power than a flowering bush.

Mrs. Snyder's bow of mirth widened into a laugh. "Well, can't she get away, even if she was born here?" said she.

However, Mrs. George B. Slade's mind travelled in such a circle that she was difficult to corner. "Why should she want to move?" said she.

Mrs. Snyder laughed again. "But, granting she should want to move, is there anything to hinder?" she asked. She wasn't a very clever woman, and was deciding privately to mimic Mrs. George B. Slade at some future occasion, and so eke out her scanty remuneration. She did not think ten dollars and expenses quite enough for such a lecture as hers.

Mrs. Slade looked at her perplexedly. "Why, yes, she could I suppose," said she, "but why?"

"What has hindered her before now?"

"Oh, her mother was a helpless invalid, and Alice was the only child, and she had been in college just a year when her father died, then she came home and lived with her mother, but her mother has been dead two years now, and Alice has plenty of money. Her father left a good deal, and her cousin and aunt live with her. Oh, yes, she could, but why should she want to leave Fairbridge, and—"

Then some new arrivals approached, and the discussion concerning Alice Mendon ceased. The ladies came rapidly now. Soon Mrs. Slade's hall, reception-room, and dining-room, in which a gaily-decked table was set, were thronged with women whose very skirts seemed full of important anticipatory stirs and rustles. Mrs. Snyder's curved smile became set, her eyes absent. She was revolving her lecture in her mind, making sure that she could repeat it without the assistance of the notes in her petticoat pocket.

Then a woman rang a little silver bell, and a woman who sat short but rose to unexpected heights stood up. The phenomenon was amazing, but all the Fairbridge ladies had seen Miss Bessy Dicky, the secretary of the Zenith Club, rise before, and no one observed anything remarkable about it. Only Mrs. Snyder's mouth twitched a little, but she instantly recovered herself and fixed her absent eyes upon Miss Bessy Dicky's long, pale face as she began to read the report of the club for the past year.

She had been reading several minutes, her glasses fixed firmly (one of her eyes had a cast),

and her lean, veinous hands trembling with excitement, when the door bell rang with a sharp peremptory peal. There was a little flutter among the ladies. Such a thing had never happened before. Fairbridge ladies were renowned for punctuality, especially at a meeting like this, and in any case, had one been late, she would never have rung the bell. She would have tapped gently on the door, the white-capped maid would have admitted her, and she, knowing she was late and hearing the hollow recitative of Miss Bessy Dicky's voice, would have tiptoed upstairs, then slipped delicately down again and into a place near the door.

But now it was different. Lottie opened the door, and a masculine voice was heard. Mrs. Slade had a storm-porch, so no one could look directly into the hall.

"Is Mrs. Slade at home?" inquired the voice distinctly. The ladies looked at one another, and Miss Bessy Dicky's reading was unheard. They all knew who spoke. Lottie appeared with a crimson face, bearing a little ostentatious silver plate with a card. Mrs. Slade adjusted her lorgnette, looked at the card, and appeared

to hesitate for a second. Then a look of calm determination overspread her face. She whispered to Lottie, and presently appeared a young man in clerical costume, moving between the seated groups of ladies with an air not so much of embarrassment as of weary patience, as if he had expected something like this to happen, and it had happened.

Mrs. Slade motioned to a chair near her, which Lottie had placed, and the young man sat down.

CHAPTER II

Many things were puzzling in Fairbridge, that is, puzzling to a person with a logical turn of mind. For instance, nobody could say that Fairbridge people were not religious. It was a church going community, and five denominations were represented in it; nevertheless, the professional expounders of its doctrines were held in a sort of gentle derision, that is, unless the expounder happened to be young and eligible from a matrimonial point of view, when he gained a certain fleeting distinction. Otherwise the clergy were regarded (in very much the same light as if employed by a railroad) as the conductors of a spiritual train of cars bound for the Promised Land. They were admittedly engaged in a cause worthy of the highest respect and veneration. The Cause commanded it, not they. They had always lacked social prestige in Fairbridge, except, as before stated, in the cases of the matrimonially eligible.

Dominie von Rosen came under that head. Consequently he was for the moment, fleeting as everybody considered it, in request. But he did not respond readily to the social patronage of Fairbridge. He was, seemingly, quite oblivious to its importance. Karl von Rosen was bored to the verge of physical illness by Fairbridge functions. Even a church affair found him wearily to the front. Therefore his presence at the Zenith Club was unprecedented and confounding. He had often been asked to attend its special meetings but had never accepted. Now, however, here he was, caught neatly in the trap of his own carelessness. Karl von Rosen should have reflected that the Zenith Club was one of the institutions of Fairbridge, and met upon a Friday, and that Mrs. George B. Slade's house was an exceedingly likely rendezvous, but he was singularly absent-minded as to what was near, and very present minded as to what was afar. That which should have been near was generally far to his mind, which was perpetually gathering the wool of rainbow sheep in distant pastures.

If there was anything in which Karl von

Rosen did not take the slightest interest, it was women's clubs in general and the Zenith Club in particular; and here he was, doomed by his own lack of thought to sit through an especially long session. He had gone out for a walk. To his mind it was a fine winter's day. The long, glittering lights of ice pleased him and whenever he was sure that he was unobserved he took a boyish run and long slide. During his walk he had reached Mrs. Slade's house, and since he worked in his pastoral calls whenever he could, by applying a sharp spur to his disinclination, it had occurred to him that he might make one, and return to his study in a virtuous frame of mind over a slight and unimportant, but bothersome duty performed. If he had had his wits about him he might have seen the feminine heads at the windows, he might have heard the quaver of Miss Bessy Dicky's voice over the club report; but he saw and heard nothing, and now he was seated in the midst of the feminine throng, and Miss Bessy Dicky's voice quavered more, and she assumed a slightly mincing attitude. Her thin hands trembled more, the hot, red spots on her

thin cheeks deepened. Reading the club reports before the minister was an epoch in an epochless life, but Karl von Rosen was oblivious of her except as a disturbing element rather more insistent than the others in which he was submerged.

He sat straight and grave, his eyes retrospective. He was constantly getting into awkward situations, and acquitting himself in them with marvellous dignity and grace. Even Mrs. Sarah Joy Snyder, astute as she was, regarded him keenly, and could not for the life of her tell whether he had come premeditately or not. She only discovered one thing, that poor Miss Bessy Dicky was reading at him and posing at him and trembling her hands at him, and that she was throwing it all away, for Von Rosen heard no more of her report than if he had been in China when she was reading it. Mrs. Snyder realised that hardly anything in nature could be so totally uninteresting to the young man as the report of a woman's club. Inasmuch as she herself was devoted to such things, she regarded him with disapproval, although with a certain admiration. Karl von Rosen always

commanded admiration, although often of a grudging character, from women. His utter indifference to them as women was the prime factor in this; next to that his really attractive, even distinguished, personality. He was handsome after the fashion which usually accompanies devotion to women. He was slight, but sinewy, with a gentle, poetical face and great black eyes, into which women were apt to project tenderness merely from their own fancy. It seemed ridiculous and anomalous that a man of Von Rosen's type should not be a lover of ladies, and the fact that he was most certainly not was both fascinating and exasperating.

Now Mrs. George B. Slade, magnificent matron, as she was, moreover one who had inhaled the perfume of adulation from her youth up, felt a calm malice. She knew that he had entered her parlour after the manner of the spider and fly rhyme of her childhood; she knew that the other ladies would infer that he had come upon her invitation, and her soul was filled with one of the petty triumphs of petty Fairbridge.

She, however, did not dream of the actual misery which filled the heart of the graceful,

dignified young man by her side. She considered herself in the position of a mother, who forces an undesired, but nevertheless, delectable sweet upon a child, who gazes at her with adoration when the savour has reached his palate. She did not expect Von Rosen to be much edified by Miss Bessy Dicky's report. She had her own opinion of Miss Bessy Dicky, of her sleeves, of her gown, and her report, but she had faith in the truly decorative features of the occasion when they should be underway, and she had immense faith in Mrs. Sarah Joy Snyder. She was relieved when Miss Bessy Dicky sat down, and endeavoured to compose her knees, which by this time were trembling like her hands, and also to assume an expression as if she had done nothing at all, and nobody was looking at her. That last because of the fact that she had done so little, and nobody was looking at her rendered her rather pathetic.

Miss Bessy Dicky did not glance at the minister, but she, nevertheless, saw him. She had never had a lover, and here was the hero of her dreams. He would never know it and nobody else would ever know it, and no harm would be

done except very possibly, by and by, a laceration of the emotions of an elderly maiden, and afterwards a life-long scar. But who goes through life without emotional scars?

After Miss Bessy Dicky sat down, Mrs. Wilbur Edes, the lady of the silver bell, rose. She lifted high her delicate chin, her perfect blond pompadour caught the light, her black lace robe swept round her in rich darkness, with occasional revelations of flower and leaf, the fairly poetical pattern of real lace. As she rose, she diffused around her a perfume as if rose-leaves were stirred up. She held a dainty handkerchief, edged with real lace, in her little left hand, which glittered with rings. In her right, was a spangled fan like a black butterfly. Mrs. Edes was past her first youth, but she was undeniably charming. She was like a little, perfect, ivory toy, which time has played with but has not injured. Mrs. Slade looked at her, then at Karl von Rosen. He looked at Mrs. Wilbur Edes, then looked away. She was most graceful, but most positively uninteresting. However, Mrs. Slade was rather pleased at that. She and Mrs. Edes were rival stars.

Von Rosen had never looked long at her, and it seemed right he should not look long at the other woman.

Mrs. Slade surveyed Mrs. Edes as she announced the next number on the programme, and told herself that Mrs. Edes' gown might be real lace and everything about her very real, and nice, and elegant, but she was certainly a little fussy for so small a woman. Mrs. Slade considered that she herself could have carried off that elegance in a much more queenly manner. There was one feature of Mrs. Edes' costume which Mrs. Slade resented. She considered that it should be worn by a woman of her own size and impressiveness. That was a little wrap of ermine. Now ermine, as everybody knew, should only be worn by large and queenly women. Mrs. Slade resolved that she herself would have an ermine wrap which should completely outshine Mrs. Edes' little affair, all swinging with tails and radiant with tiny, bright-eyed heads.

Mrs. Edes announced a duet by Miss MacDonald and Mrs. Wells, and sat down, and again the perfume of rose leaves was percepti-

ble. Karl von Rosen glanced at the next performers, Miss MacDonald, who was very pretty and well-dressed in white embroidered cloth, and Mrs. Wells, who was not pretty, but was considered very striking, who trailed after her in green folds edged with fur, and bore a roll of music. She seated herself at the piano with a graceful sweep of her green draperies, which defined her small hips, and struck the keys with slender fingers quite destitute of rings, always lifting them high with a palpable affectation not exactly doubtful—that was saying too much—but she was considered to reach limits of propriety with her sinuous motions, the touch of her sensitive fingers upon piano keys, and the quick flash of her dark eyes in her really plain face. There was, for the women in Fairbridge, a certain mischievous fascination about Mrs. Wells. Moreover, they had in her their one object of covert gossip, their one stimulus to unlawful imagination.

There was a young man who played the violin. His name was Henry Wheaton, and he was said to be a frequent caller at Mrs. Wells', and she played his accompaniments, and Mr.

Wells was often detained in New York until the late train. Then there was another young man who played the 'cello, and he called often. And there was Ellis Bainbridge, who had a fine tenor voice, and he called. It was delightful to have a woman of that sort, of whom nothing distinctly culpable could be affirmed, against whom no good reason could be brought for excluding her from the Zenith Club and the social set. In their midst, Mrs. Wells furnished the condiments, the spice, and pepper, and mustard for many functions. She relieved to a great extent the monotony of unquestioned propriety. It would have been horribly dull if there had been no woman in the Zenith Club who furnished an excuse for the other members' gossip.

Leila MacDonald, so carefully dressed and brushed and washed, and so free from defects that she was rather irritating, began to sing, then people listened. Karl von Rosen listened. She really had a voice which always surprised and charmed with the first notes, then ceased to charm. Leila MacDonald was as a good canary bird, born to sing, and dutifully singing,

but without the slightest comprehension of her song. It was odd too that she sang with plenty of expression, but her own lack of realisation seemed to dull it for her listeners. Karl von Rosen listened, then his large eyes again turned introspective.

Mrs. Edes again arose, after the singing and playing ladies had finished their performance and returned to their seats, and announced a recitation by Miss Sally Anderson. Miss Anderson wore a light summer gown, and swept to the front, and bent low to her audience, then at once began her recitation with a loud crash of emotion. She postured, she gesticulated. She lowered her voice to inaudibility, she raised it to shrieks and wails. She did everything which she had been taught, and she had been taught a great deal. Mrs. Sarah Joy Snyder listened and got data for future lectures, with her mirthful mouth sternly set.

After Sally Anderson, Mrs. Jack Evarts played a glittering thing called "Waves of the Sea." Then Sally Anderson recited again, then Mrs. Wilbur Edes spoke at length, and with an air which commanded attention, and

Von Rosen suffered agonies. He laughed with sickly spurts at Mrs. Snyder's confidential sallies, when she had at last her chance to deliver herself of her ten dollar speech, but the worst ordeal was to follow. Von Rosen was fluttered about by women bearing cups of tea, of frothy chocolate, plates of cake, dishes of bonbons, and saucers of ice-cream. He loathed sweets and was forced into accepting a plate. He stood in the midst of the feminine throng, the solitary male figure looking at his cup of chocolate, and a slice of sticky cake, and at an ice representing a chocolate lily, which somebody had placed for special delectation upon a little table at his right. Then Alice Mendon came to his rescue.

She deftly took the plate with the sticky cake, and the cup of hot chocolate, and substituted a plate with a chicken mayonnaise sandwich, smiling pleasantly as she did so.

"Here," she whispered. "Why do you make a martyr of yourself for such a petty cause? Do it for the faith if you want to, but not for thick chocolate and angel cake."

She swept away the chocolate lily also.

Von Rosen looked at her gratefully. "Thank you," he murmured.

She laughed. "Oh, you need not thank me," she said. "I have a natural instinct to rescue men from sweets." She laughed again maliciously. "I am sure you have enjoyed the club very much," she said.

Von Rosen coloured before her sarcastic, kindly eyes. He began to speak, but she interrupted him. "You have heard that silence is golden," said she. "It is always golden when speech would be a lie."

Then she turned away and seized upon the chocolate lily and pressed it upon Mrs. Joy Snyder, who was enjoying adulation and good things.

"Do please have this lovely lily, Mrs. Snyder," she said. "It is the very prettiest ice of the lot, and meant especially for you. I am sure you will enjoy it."

And Mrs. Sarah Joy Snyder, whose sense of humour deserted her when she was being praised and fed, and who had already eaten bonbons innumerable, and three ices with accompanying cake, took the chocolate lily grate-

fully. Von Rosen ate his chicken sandwich and marvelled at the ways of women.

After Von Rosen had finished his sandwiches and tea, he made his way to Mrs. Snyder, and complimented her upon her lecture. He had a constitutional dislike for falsehoods, which was perhaps not so much a virtue as an idiosyncrasy. Now he told Mrs. Snyder that he had never heard a lecture which seemed to amuse an audience more than hers had done, and that he quite envied her because of her power of holding attention. Mrs. Snyder, with the last petal of her chocolate lily sweet upon her tongue, listened with such a naïveté of acquiescence that she was really charming, and Von Rosen had spoken the truth. He had wondered, when he saw the eagerly tilted faces of the women, and heard their bursts of shrill laughter and clapping of hands, why he could not hold them with his sermons which, he might assume without vanity, contained considerable subject for thought, as this woman, with her face like a mask of mirth, held them with her compilation of platitudes.

He thought that he had never seen so many

women listen with such intensity, and lack of self-consciousness. He had seen only two pat their hair, only one glance at her glittering rings, only three arrange the skirts of their gowns while the lecture was in progress. Sometimes during his sermons, he felt as if he were holding forth to a bewildering sea of motion with steadily recurrent waves, which fascinated him, of feathers, and flowers, swinging fur tails, and kid-gloved hands, fluttering ribbons, and folds of drapery. Karl von Rosen would not have acknowledged himself as a woman-hater, that savoured too much of absurd male egotism, but he had an under conviction that women were, on the whole, admitting of course exceptions, self-centred in the pursuit of petty ends to the extent of absolute viciousness. He disliked women, although he had never owned it to himself.

In spite of his dislike of women, Von Rosen had a house-keeper. He had made an ineffectual trial of an ex-hotel chef, but had finally been obliged to resort to Mrs. Jane Riggs. She was tall and strong, wider-shouldered than hipped. She went about her work with long

strides. She never fussed. She never asked questions. In fact, she seldom spoke.

When Von Rosen entered his house that night, after the club meeting, he had a comfortable sense of returning to an embodied silence. The coal fire in his study grate was red and clear. Everything was in order without misplacement. That was one of Jane Riggs' chief talents. She could tidy things without misplacing them. Von Rosen loved order, and was absolutely incapable of keeping it. Therefore Jane Riggs' orderliness was as balm. He sat down in his Morris chair before his fire, stretched out his legs to the warmth, which was grateful after the icy outdoor air, rested his eyes upon a plaster cast over the chimney place, which had been tinted a beautiful hue by his own pipe, and sighed with content. His own handsome face was rosy with the reflection of the fire, his soul rose-coloured with complete satisfaction. He was so glad to be quit of that crowded assemblage of eager femininity, so glad that it was almost worth while to have encountered it just for that sense of blessed relief.

Mrs. Edes had offered to take him home in her carriage, and he had declined almost brusquely. To have exchanged that homeward walk over the glistening earth, and under the clear rose and violet lights of the winter sunset, with that sudden rapturous discovery of the slender crescent of the new moon, for a ride with Mrs. Edes in her closed carriage with her silvery voice in his ear instead of the keen silence of the winter air, would have been torture. Von Rosen wondered at himself for disliking Mrs. Edes in particular, whereas he disliked most women in general. There was something about her feline motions instinct with swiftness, and concealed claws, and the half keen, half sleepy glances of her green-blue eyes, which irritated him beyond measure, and he was ashamed of being irritated. It implied a power over him, and yet it was certainly not a physical power. It was subtle and pertained to spirit. He realised, as did many in Fairbridge, a strange influence, defying reason and will, which this small woman with her hidden swiftness had over nearly everybody with whom she came in contact. It had nothing

whatever to do with sex. She would have produced it in the same degree, had she not been in the least attractive. It was compelling, and at the same time irritating.

Von Rosen in his Morris chair after the tea welcomed the intrusion of Jane Riggs, which dispelled his thought of Mrs. Wilbur Edes. Jane stood beside the chair, a rigid straight length of woman with a white apron starched like a board, covering two thirds of her, and waited for interrogation.

"What is it, Jane?" asked Von Rosen.

Jane Riggs replied briefly. "Outlandish young woman out in the kitchen," she said with distinct disapproval, yet with evident helplessness before the situation.

Von Rosen started. "Where is the dog?"

"Licking her hands. Every time I told her to go, Jack growled. Mebbe you had better come out yourself, Mr. Von Rosen."

When Von Rosen entered the kitchen, he saw a little figure on the floor in a limp heap, with the dog frantically licking its hands, which were very small and brown and piteously outspread, as if in supplication.

"Mebbe you had better call up the doctor on the telephone; she seems to have swooned away," said Jane Riggs. At the same time she made one long stride to the kitchen sink, and water. Von Rosen looked aghast at the stricken figure, which was wrapped in a queer medley of garments. He also saw on the floor near by a bulging suitcase.

"She is one of them pedlars," said Jane Riggs, dashing water upon the dumb little face. "I rather guess you had better call up the doctor on the telephone. She don't seem to be coming to easy and she may have passed away."

Von Rosen gasped, then he looked pitifully at the poor little figure, and ran back to his study to the telephone. To his great relief as he passed the window, he glanced out, and saw Doctor Sturtevant's automobile making its way cautiously over the icy street. Then for the first time he remembered that he had been due at that time about a matter of a sick parishioner. He opened the front door hurriedly, and stated the case, and the two men carried the little unconscious creature upstairs. Then

Von Rosen came down, leaving the doctor and Martha with her. He waited in the study, listening to the sounds overhead, waiting impatiently for the doctor's return, which was not for half an hour or more. In the meantime Martha came downstairs on some errand to the kitchen. Von Rosen intercepted her. "What does Doctor Sturtevant think?" he asked.

"Dunno, what he thinks," replied Martha brusquely, pushing past him.

"Is she conscious yet?"

"Dunno, I ain't got any time to talk," said Martha, casting a flaming look at him over her shoulder as she entered the kitchen.

Von Rosen retreated to the study, where he was presently joined by the doctor. "What is it?" asked Von Rosen with an emphasis, which rendered it so suspicious that he might have added: "what the devil is it?" had it not been for his profession.

Sturtevant answered noiselessly, the motion of his lips conveying his meaning. Then he said, shrugging himself into his fur coat, as he spoke, "I have to rush my motor to see a

patient, whom I dare not leave another moment, then I will be back."

Von Rosen's great Persian cat had curled himself on the doctor's fur coat, and now shaken off, sat with a languid dignity, his great yellow plume of a tail waving, and his eyes like topazes fixed intently upon Sturtevant. At that moment a little cry was heard from the guest room, a cry between a moan and a scream, but unmistakably a note of suffering. Sturtevant jammed his fur cap upon his head and pulled on his gloves.

"Don't go," pleaded Von Rosen in a sudden terror of helplessness.

"I must, but I'll break the speed laws and be back before you know it. That housekeeper of yours is as good as any trained nurse, and better. She is as hard as nails, but she does her duty like a machine, and she has brains. I will be back in a few minutes."

Then Sturtevant was gone, and Von Rosen sat again before his study fire. There was another little note of suffering from above. Von Rosen shuddered, rose, and closed his door. The Persian cat came and sat in front of him,

and gazed at him with jewel-like eyes. There was an expression of almost human anxiety and curiosity upon the animal's face. He came from a highly developed race; he and his forbears had always been with humans. At times it seemed to Von Rosen as if the cat had a dumb knowledge of the most that he himself knew. He reached down and patted the shapely golden head, but the cat withdrew, curled himself into a coil of perfect luxurious-ness, with the firelight casting a warm, rosy glow upon his golden beauty, purred a little while, then sank into the mystery of animal sleep.

Von Rosen sat listening. He told himself that Sturtevant should be back within half an hour. When only ten minutes had passed he took out his watch and was dismayed to find how short a time had elapsed. He replaced his watch and leaned back. He was always listening uneasily. He had encountered illness and death and distress, but never anything quite like this. He had always been able to give personal aid. Now he felt barred out, and fiercely helpless.

He sat ten minutes longer. Then he arose. He could reach the kitchen by another way which did not lead past the stairs. He went out there, treading on tiptoe. The cat had looked up, stretched, and lazily gotten upon his feet and followed him, tail waving like a pennant. He brushed around Von Rosen out in the kitchen, and mewed a little, delicate, high-bred mew. The dog came leaping up the basement stairs, sat up and begged. Von Rosen opened the ice box and found therein some steak. He cut off large pieces and fed the cat and dog. He also found milk and filled a saucer.

He stole back to the study. He thought he had closed all the doors, but presently the cat entered, then sat down and began to lick himself with his little red rough tongue. Von Rosen looked at his watch again. The house shook a little, and he knew that the shaking was caused by Jane Riggs, walking upstairs. He longed to go upstairs but knew that he could not, and again that rage of helplessness came over him. He reflected upon human life, the agony of its beginning; the agony, in spite of

bravery, in spite of denial of agony, the agony under the brightest of suns, of its endurance; the agony of its end; and his reflections were almost blasphemous. His religion seemed to crumble beneath the standing-place of his soul. A torture of doubt, a certainty of ignorance, in spite of the utmost efforts of faith, came over him. The cat coiled himself again and sank into sleep. Von Rosen gazed at him. What if the accepted order of things were reversed, after all? What if that beautiful little animal were on a higher plane than he? Certainly the cat did not suffer, and certainly suffering and doubt degraded even the greatest.

He looked at his watch and saw that Sturtevant had been gone five minutes over the half hour. He switched off the electric light, and stood in his window, which faced the street down which the doctor in his car must come. He realised at once that this was more endurable. He was doing what a woman would have done long before. He was masculine, and had not the quick instinct to stand by the window and watch out, to ease impatience. The road was like a broad silver band under the moon.

The lights in house windows gleamed through drawn shades, except in one house, where he could see quite distinctly a woman seated beside a lamp with a green shade, sewing, with regular motions of a red, silk-clad arm. Von Rosen strained his eyes, and saw, as he thought, a dark bulk advancing far down the street. He watched and watched, then noted that the dark bulk had not moved. He wondered if the motor had broken down. He thought of running out to see, and made a motion to go, then he saw swiftly-moving lights pass the dark bulk. He thought they were the lights of the motor, but as they passed he saw it was a cab taking someone to the railroad station. He knew then that the dark bulk was a clump of trees.

Then, before he could fairly sense it, the doctor's motor came hurtling down the street, its search-lights glaring, swinging from side to side. The machine stopped, and Von Rosen ran to the door.

"Here I am," said Sturtevant in a hushed voice. There was a sound from the room above, and the doctor, Von Rosen and nurse

looked at each other. Then Von Rosen sat again alone in his study, and now, in spite of the closed door, he heard noises above stairs. Solitude was becoming frightful to him. He felt all at once strangely young, like a child, and a pitiful sense of injury was over him, but the sense of injury was not for himself alone, but for all mankind. He realised that all mankind was enormously pitiful and injured, by the mere fact of their obligatory existence. And he wished more than anything in the world for some understanding soul with whom to share his sense of the universal grievance.

But he continued to sit alone, and the cat slept in his golden coil of peace. Then suddenly the cat sat up, and his jewel eyes glowed. He looked fixedly at a point in the room. Von Rosen looked in the same direction but saw nothing except his familiar wall. Then he heard steps on the stairs, and the door opened, and Jane Riggs entered. She was white and stern. She was tragic. Her lean fingers were clutching at the air. Von Rosen stared at her. She sat down and swept her crackling white apron over her head.

CHAPTER III

When Margaret Edes had returned home after the Zenith Club, she devoted an hour to rest. She had ample time for that before dressing for a dinner which she and her husband were to give in New York that evening. The dinner was set for rather a late hour in order to enable Margaret to secure this rest before the train-time. She lay on a couch before the fire, in her room which was done in white and gold. Her hair was perfectly arranged, for she had scarcely moved her head during the club meeting, and had adjusted and removed her hat with the utmost caution. Now she kept her shining head perfectly still upon a rather hard pillow. She did not relax her head, but she did relax her body, and the result, as she was aware, would be beautifying.

Still as her head remained, she allowed no lines of disturbance to appear upon her face, and for that matter, no lines of joy. Secretly she did not approve of smiles, more than she approved

of tears. Both of them, she knew, tended to leave traces, and other people, especially other women, did not discriminate between the traces of tears and smiles. Therefore, lying with her slim graceful body stretched out at full length upon her couch, Margaret Edes' face was as absolutely devoid of expression as a human face could well be, and this although she was thinking rather strenuously. She had not been pleased with the impression which Mrs. Sarah Joy Snyder had made upon the Zenith Club, because Mrs. Slade, and not she, had been instrumental in securing her valuable services. Mrs. Edes had a Napoleonic ambition which was tragic and pathetic, because it could command only a narrow scope for its really unusual force. If Mrs. Edes had only been possessed of the opportunity to subjugate Europe, nothing except another Waterloo could have stopped her onward march. But she had absolutely nothing to subjugate except poor little Fairbridge. She was a woman of power which was wasted. She was absurdly tragic, but none the less tragic. Power spent upon petty ends is one of the greatest disasters of the

world. It wrecks not only the spender, but its object. Mrs. Edes was horribly and unworthily unhappy, reflecting upon Mrs. Sarah Joy Snyder and Mrs. Slade. She cared very much because Mrs. Slade and not she had brought about this success of the Zenith Club, with Mrs. Snyder as high-light. It was a shame to her, but she could not help it, because one living within narrow horizons must have limited aims.

If only her husband had enough money to enable her to live in New York after the manner which would have suited her, she felt capable of being a leading power in that great and dreadful city. Probably she was right. The woman was in reality possessed of abnormal nerve force. Had Wilbur Edes owned millions, and she been armed with the power which they can convey, she might have worked miracles in her subtle feminine fashion. She would always have worked subtly, and never believed her feminine self. She understood its worth too well. She would have conquered like a cat, because she understood her weapons, her velvet charm, her purr, and her claws. She would

not have attempted a growling and bulky leap into success. She would have slid and insinuated and made her gliding progress almost imperceptible, but none the less remorseless.

But she was fated to live in Fairbridge. What else could she do? Wilbur Edes was successful in his profession, but he was not an accumulator, and neither was she. His income was large during some years, but it was spent during those years for things which seemed absolutely indispensable to both husband and wife. For instance, to-night Wilbur would spend an extravagant sum upon this dinner, which he was to give at an extravagant hotel to some people whom Mrs. Edes had met last summer, and who, if not actually in the great swim, were in the outer froth of it, and she had vague imaginings of future gain through them. Wilbur had carried his dress suit in that morning. He was to take a room in the hotel and change, and meet her at the New York side of the ferry. As she thought of the ferry it was all Mrs. Edes could do to keep her smooth brow from a frown. Somehow the ferry always humiliated her; the necessity of

going up or down that common, democratic gang plank, clinging to the tail of her fine gown, and seating herself in a row with people who glanced askance at her evening wrap and her general magnificence.

Poor Mrs. Edes was so small and slight that holding up magnificence and treading the deck with her high-heeled shoes was physically fatiguing. Had she been of a large, powerful physique, had her body matched her mind, she might not have felt a sense of angry humiliation. As it was, she realised that for her, *her,* to be obliged to cross the ferry was an insult at the hands of Providence. But the tunnel was no better, perhaps worse,—that plunged into depths below the waters, like one in a public bath. Anything so exquisite, so dainty, so subtly fine and powerful as herself, should not have been condemned to this. She should have been able to give her dinners in her own magnificent New York mansion. As it was, there was nothing for her except to dress and accept the inevitable.

It was as bad as if Napoleon the Great had been forced to ride to battle on a trolley car,

instead of being booted and spurred and astride a charger, which lifted one fore-leg in a fling of scorn. Of course Wilbur would meet her, and they would take a taxicab, but even a taxicab seemed rather humiliating to her. It should have been her own private motor car. And she would be obliged to descend the stairs at the station ungracefully, one hand clutching nervously at the tail of her gorgeous gown, the other at her evening cloak. It was absolutely impossible for so slight a woman to descend stairs with dignity and grace, holding up an evening cloak and a long gown.

However, there would be compensations later. She thought, with decided pleasure, of the private dining-room, and the carefully planned and horribly expensive decorations, which would be eminently calculated to form a suitable background for herself. The flowers and candle-shades were to be yellow, and she was to wear her yellow chiffon gown, with touches of gold embroidery, a gold comb set with topazes in her yellow hair, and on her breast a large, gleaming stone which was a yellow diamond of very considerable value. Wil-

bur had carried in his suit case her yellow satin slippers, her gold-beaded fan, and the queer little wrap of leopard skin which she herself had fashioned from a rug which her husband had given her. She had much skill in fashioning articles for her own adornment as a cat has in burnishing his fur, and would at any time have sacrificed the curtains or furniture covers, had they met her needs.

She would not be obliged—crowning disgrace—to carry a bag. All she would need would be her little case for tickets, and her change purse, and her evening cloak had pockets. The evening cloak lay beside the yellow chiffon gown, carefully disposed on the bed, which had a lace counterpane over yellow satin. The cloak was of a creamy cloth lined with mink, a sumptuous affair, and she had a tiny mink toque with one yellow rose as head covering.

She glanced approvingly at the rich attire spread upon the bed, and then thought again of the dreadful ferry, and her undignified hop across the dirty station to the boat. She longed for the days of sedan chairs, for anything rather than this. She was an exquisite lady

caught in the toils of modern cheap progress toward all her pleasures and profits. She did not belong in a democratic country at all unless she had millions. She was out of place, as much out of place as a splendid Angora in an alley. Fairbridge to her instincts was an alley; yet since it was her alley, she had to make the best of it. Had she not made the best of it, exalted it, magnified it, she would have gone mad. Wherefore the triumph of Mrs. Slade in presenting Mrs. Sarah Joy Snyder seemed to her like an affair of moment. For lack of something greater to hate and rival, she hated and rivalled Mrs. Slade. For lack of something big over which to reign, she wished to reign over Fairbridge and the Zenith Club. Mrs. Slade's perfectly-matched drawing-room took on the semblance of a throne-room, in which she had been herself usurped.

Then she thought of the young clergyman, even as he was thinking of her. She knew perfectly well how he had been trapped, but she failed to see the slightest humour in it. She had no sense of humour. She saw only the additional triumph of Mrs. Slade in securing

this rather remarkable man at the Zenith Club, something which she herself had never been able to do. Von Rosen's face came before her. She considered it a handsome face, but no man's face could disturb her. She held her virtue with as nervous a clutch as she held up her fine gown. To soil either would be injudicious, impolitic, and she never desired the injudicious and impolitic.

"He is a handsome man," she said to herself, "an aristocratic-looking man." Then the telephone bell close beside her divan rang, and she took up the receiver carefully, not moving her head, sat up, and put her delicate lips to the speaking tube.

"Hello," said a voice, and she recognised it as Von Rosen's although it had an agitated, nervous ring which was foreign to it.

"What is it?" she said in reply, and the voice responded with volubility, "A girl, a young Syrian girl, is at my home. She is in a swoon or something. We cannot revive her. Is the doctor at home? Tell him to hurry over, please. I am Mr. von Rosen. Tell him to hurry. She may be dead."

"You have made a mistake, Mr. von Rosen," said Mrs. Edes' thin voice, as thin and silvery as a reed. "You are speaking to Mrs. Wilbur Edes. My telephone number is 5R. You doubtless want Doctor Sturtevant. His number is 51M."

"Oh, pardon," cried the voice over the telephone. "Sorry to have disturbed you, Mrs. Edes, I mistook—"

The voice trailed into nothingness. There was a sharp ring. Mrs. Edes hung up her receiver. She thought slowly that it was a strange circumstance that Mr. von Rosen should have a fainting or dead young Syrian girl in his house. Then she rose from the divan, holding her head very stiffly, and began to dress. She had just enough time to dress leisurely and catch the train. She called on one of the two maids to assist her and was quite equipped, even to the little mink toque, fastened very carefully on her shining head, when there was a soft push at the door, and her twin daughters, Maida and Adelaide, entered. They were eight years old, but looked younger. They were almost exactly alike as to small,

pretty features and pale blond colouring. Maida scowled a little, and Adelaide did not, and people distinguished them by that when in doubt.

They stood and stared at their mother with a curious expression on their sharp, delicate little faces. It was not exactly admiration, it was not wonder, nor envy, nor affection, yet tinctured by all.

Mrs. Edes looked at them. "Maida," said she, "do not wear that blue hair-ribbon again. It is soiled. Have you had your dinners?"

"Yes, mamma," responded first one, then the other, Maida with the frown being slightly in the lead.

"Then you had better go to bed," said Mrs. Edes, and the two little girls stood carefully aside to allow her to pass.

"Good night, children," said Mrs. Edes without turning her mink-crowned head. The little girls watched the last yellow swirl of their mother's skirts, disappearing around the stair-landing, then Adelaide spoke.

"I mean to wear red, myself, when I'm grown up," said she.

"Ho, just because Jim Carr likes red," retorted Maida. "As for me, I mean to have a gown just like hers, only a little deeper shade of yellow."

Adelaide laughed, an unpleasantly snarling little laugh. "Ho," said she, "just because Val Thomas likes yellow."

Then the coloured maid, Emma, who was cross because Mrs. Edes' evening out had deprived her of her own, and had been ruthlessly hanging her mistress's gown which she had worn to the club in a wad on a closet hook, disregarding its perfumed hanger, turned upon them.

"Heah, ye chillun," said she, "your ma sid for you to go to baid."

Each little girl had her white bed with a canopy of pink silk in a charming room. There were garlands of rosebuds on the wallpaper and the furniture was covered with rosebud chintz.

While their mother was indignantly sailing across the North River, her daughters lay awake, building air-castles about themselves and their boy-lovers, which fevered their im-

aginations, and aged them horribly in a spiritual sense.

"Amy White's mother plays dominoes with her every evening," Maida remarked. Her voice sounded incredibly old, full of faint derisiveness and satire, but absolutely non-complaining.

"Amy White's mother would look awfully funny in a gown like Mamma's," said Adelaide.

"I suppose that is why she plays dominoes with Amy," said Maida in her old voice.

"Oh, don't talk any more, Maida, I want to go to sleep," said Adelaide pettishly, but she was not in the least sleepy. She wished to return to the air-castle in which she had been having sweet converse with Jim Carr. This air-castle was the abode of innocence, but it was not yet time for its building at all. It was such a little childish creature who lay curled up under the coverlid strewn with rosebuds that the gates of any air-castle of life and love, and knowledge, however innocent and ignorant, should have been barred against her, perhaps with dominoes.

However, she entered in, her soft cheeks burning, and her pulse tingling, and saw the strange light through its fairy windows, and her sister also entered her air-castle, and all the time their mother was sailing across the North River toward the pier where her husband waited. She kept one gloved hand upon the fold of her gown, ready to clutch it effectually clear of the dirty deck when the pier was reached. When she was in the taxicab with Wilbur, she thought again of Von Rosen. "Dominie von Rosen made a mistake," said she, "and called up the wrong number. He wanted Doctor Sturtevant, and he got me." Then she repeated the message. "What do you suppose he was doing with a fainting Syrian girl in his house?" she ended.

A chuckle shook the dark bulk in its fur lined coat at her side. "The question is why the Syrian girl chose Von Rosen's house to faint in," said he lightly.

"Oh, don't be funny, Wilbur," said Margaret. "Have you seen the dining-room? How does it look?"

"I thought it beautiful, and I am sure you

will like it," said Wilbur Edes in the chastened tone which he commonly used toward his wife. He had learned long ago that facetiousness displeased her, and he lived only to please her, aside from his interest in his profession. Poor Wilbur Edes thought his wife very wonderful, and watched with delight the hats doffed when she entered the hotel lift like a little beruffled yellow canary. He wished those men could see her later, when the canary resemblance had altogether ceased, when she would look tall and slender and lithe in her clinging yellow gown with the great yellow stone gleaming in her corsage.

For some reason Margaret Edes held her husband's admiration with a more certain tenure because she could not be graceful when weighed down with finery. The charm of her return to grace was a never-ending surprise. Wilbur Edes loved his wife more comfortably than he loved his children. He loved them a little uneasily. They were unknown elements to him, and he sometimes wished that he had more time at home, to get them firmly fixed in his comprehension. Without the slightest con-

demnation of his wife, he had never regarded her as a woman in whom the maternal was a distinguishing feature. He saw with approbation the charming externals with which she surrounded their offspring. It was a gratification to him to be quite sure that Maida's hair ribbon would always be fresh and tied perkily, and that Adelaide would be full of dainty little gestures copied from her mother, but he had some doubts as to whether his wonderful Margaret might not be too perfect in herself, and too engrossed with the duties pertaining to perfection to be quite the proper manager of imperfection and immaturity represented by childhood.

"How did you leave the children?" he inquired when they were in their bedroom at the hotel, and he was fitting the yellow satin slippers to his wife's slender silk shod feet.

"The children were as well as usual. I told Emma to put them to bed. Do you think the orchids in the dining-room are the right shade, Wilbur?"

"I am quite sure. I am glad that you told Emma to put them to bed."

"I always do. Mrs. George B. Slade is most unpleasantly puffed up."

"Why?"

"Oh, because she got Mrs. Sarah Joy Snyder to speak to the club."

"Did she do her stunt well?"

"Well enough. Mrs. Slade was so pleased, it was really offensive."

Wilbur Edes had an inspiration. "The Fay-Wymans," said he (the Fay-Wymans were the principal guests of their dinner party), "know a lot of theatrical people. I will see if I can't get them to induce somebody, say Lydia Greenway, to run out some day; I suppose it would have to be later on, just after the season, and do a stunt at the club."

"Oh, that would be simply charming," cried Margaret, "and I would rather have it in the spring, because everything looks so much prettier. But don't you think it will be impossible, Wilbur?"

"Not with money as an inducement." Wilbur had the pleasant consciousness of an unusually large fee which was sure to be his own before that future club meeting, and he could

see no better employment for it than to enable his adored wife to outshine Mrs. George B. Slade. When in New York engaged in his profession, Wilbur Edes was entirely free from the vortex of Fairbridge, but his wife, with its terrible eddies still agitating her garments, could suck him therein, even in the great city. He was very susceptible to her influence.

Margaret Edes beamed at her husband as he rose. "That will make Marion Slade furious," she said. She extended her feet. "Pretty slippers, aren't they, Wilbur?"

"Charming, my dear."

Margaret was so pleased that she tried to do something very amiable.

"That was funny, I mean what you said about the Syrian girl at the Dominie's," she volunteered, and laughed, without making a crease in her fair little face. She was really adorable, far more than pretty, leaning back with one slender, yellow-draped leg crossed over the other, revealing the glittering slippers and one silken ankle.

"It does sound somewhat queer, a Syrian girl fainting in the Dominie's house," said

Wilbur. "She could not have found a house where her sex, of any nationality, are in less repute."

"Then you don't think that Alice Mendon—?" There was a faint note of jealousy in Margaret's voice, although she herself had not the slightest interest in Dominie von Rosen or any man, except her husband; and in him only because he was her husband. As the husband of her wonderful self, he acquired a certain claim to respect, even affection, such as she had to bestow.

"I don't think Alice Mendon would take up with the Dominie, if he would with her," responded Wilbur Edes hastily. Margaret did not understand his way of speaking, but just then she looked at herself in an opposite mirror, and pulled down one side of her blond pompadour a bit, which softened her face, and added to its allurement. The truth was Wilbur Edes, before he met Margaret, had proposed to Alice Mendon. Alice had never told, and he had not, consequently Margaret did not know. Had she known it would have made no difference, since she could not imagine any

man preferring Alice to herself. All her jealousy was based upon the facts of her superior height, and ability to carry herself well, where she knew herself under many circumstances about as graceful as an Angora cat walking upon her hind legs. She was absolutely sure of her husband. The episode with Alice had occurred before he had ever even seen Herself. She smiled radiantly upon him as she arose. She was conscious of no affection for her husband, but she was conscious of a desire to show appreciation, and to display radiance for his delectation.

"It is charming of you to think of getting Lydia Greenway to read, you dear old man," said she. Wilbur beamed.

"Well, of course, I can not be sure, that is not absolutely sure, but if it is to be done, I will manage it," said he.

It was at this very time, for radically different notes sound at the same time in the harmony or discord of life, that Von Rosen's housekeeper, Jane Riggs, stood before him with that crackling white apron swept over her face.

"What is it?" asked Von Rosen, and he real-

ised that his lips were stiff, and his voice sounded strange.

A strange harsh sob came from behind the apron. "She was all bent to one side with that heavy suit case, as heavy as lead, for I hefted it," said Jane Riggs, "and she couldn't have been more than fifteen. Them outlandish girls get married awful young."

"What is it?"

"And there was poor Jack lickin' her hands, and him a dog everybody is so scared of, and she a sinkin' down in a heap on my kitchen floor."

"What is it?"

"She has passed away," answered Jane Riggs, "and—the baby is a boy, and no bigger than the cat, not near as big as the cat when I come to look at him, and I put some of my old flannels and my shimmy on him, and Doctor Sturtevant has got him in my darning basket, all lined with newspapers, the New York *Sun*, and the *Times* and hot water bottles, and it's all happened in the best chamber, and I call it pretty goings on."

Jane Riggs gave vent to discordant sobs.

Her apron crackled. Von Rosen took hold of her shoulders. "Go straight back up there," he ordered.

"Why couldn't she have gone in and fainted away somewhere where there was more women than one," said Jane Riggs. "Doctor Sturtevant, he sent me down for more newspapers."

"Take these, and go back at once," said Von Rosen, and he gathered up the night papers in a crumpled heap and thrust them upon the woman.

"He said you had better telephone for Mrs. Bestwick," said Jane. Mrs. Bestwick was the resident nurse of Fairbridge. Von Rosen sprang to the telephone, but he could get no response whatever from the Central office, probably on account of the ice-coated wires.

He sat down disconsolately, and the cat leapt upon his knees, but he pushed him away impatiently, to be surveyed in consequence by those topaz eyes with a regal effect of injury, and astonishment. Von Rosen listened. He wondered if he heard, or imagined that he heard, a plaintive little wail. The dog snuggled close to him, and he felt a warm tongue lap. Von

Rosen patted the dog's head. Here was sympathy. The cat's leap into his lap had been purely selfish. Von Rosen listened. He got up, and tried to telephone again, but got no response from Central. He hung up the receiver emphatically and sat down again. The dog again came close, and he patted the humble loving head. Von Rosen listened again, and again could not be sure whether he actually heard or imagined that he heard, the feeblest, most helpless cry ever lifted up from this earth, that of a miserable new born baby with its uncertain future reaching before it and all the sins of its ancertors upon its devoted head.

When at last the door opened and Doctor Sturtevant entered, he was certain. That poor little atom of humanity upstairs was lifting up its voice of feeble rage and woe because of its entrance into existence. Sturtevant had an oddly apologetic look. "I assure you I am sorry, my dear fellow—" he began.

"Is the poor little beggar going to live?" asked Von Rosen.

"Well, yes, I think so, judging from the pres-

ent outlook," replied the doctor still apologetically.

"I could not get Mrs. Bestwick," said Von Rosen anxiously. "I think the telephone is out of commission, on account of the ice."

"Never mind that. Your housekeeper is a jewel, and I will get Mrs. Bestwick on my way home. I say, Von Rosen—"

Von Rosen looked at him inquiringly.

"Oh, well, never mind; I really must be off now," said the doctor hurriedly. "I will get Mrs. Bestwick here as soon as possible. I think—the child will have to be kept here for a short time anyway, considering the weather, and everything."

"Why, of course," said Von Rosen.

After the doctor had gone, he went out in the kitchen. He had had no dinner. Jane Riggs, who had very acute hearing, came to the head of the stairs, and spoke in a muffled tone, muffled as Von Rosen knew because of the presence of death and life in the house. "The roast is in the oven, Mr. von Rosen," said she, "I certainly hope it isn't too dry, and the soup is in the kettle, and the vegetables are all ready

to dish up. Everything is ready except the coffee."

"You know I can make that," called Von Rosen in alarm. "Don't think of coming down."

Von Rosen could make very good coffee. It was an accomplishment of his college days. He made some now. He felt the need of it. Then he handily served the very excellent dinner, and sat down at his solitary dining table. As he ate his soup, he glanced across the table, and a blush like that of a girl overspread his dark face. He had a vision of a high chair, and a child installed therein with the customary bib and spoon. It was a singular circumstance, but everything in life moves in sequences, and that poor Syrian child upstairs, in her dire extremity, was furnishing a sequence in the young man's life, before she went out of it. Her stimulation of his sympathy and imagination was to change the whole course of his existence.

Meanwhile, Doctor Sturtevant was having a rather strenuous argument with his wife, who for once stood against him. She had her not-

to-be-silenced personal note. She had a horror of the alien and unusual. All her life she had walked her chalk-line, and anything outside savoured of the mysterious, and terrible. She was Anglo-Saxon. She was what her ancestresses had been for generations. The strain was unchanged, and had become so tense and narrow that it was almost fathomless. Mrs. Sturtevant, good and benevolent on her chalk-line, was involuntarily a bigot. She looked at Chinese laundry men, poor little yellow figures, shuffling about with bags of soiled linen, with thrills of recoil. She would not have acknowledged it to herself, for she came of a race which favoured abolition, but nothing could have induced her to have a coloured girl in her kitchen. Her imaginations and prejudices were stained as white as her skin. There was a lone man living on the outskirts of Fairbridge, in a little shack built by himself in the woods, who was said to have Indian blood in his veins, and Mrs. Sturtevant never saw him without that awful thrill of recoil. When the little Orientals, men or women, swayed sidewise and bent with their cheap

suitcases filled with Eastern handiwork, came to the door, she did not draw a long breath until she had watched them out of sight down the street. It made no difference to her that they might be Christians, that they might have suffered persecution in their own land and sought our doorless entrances of hospitality; she still realised her own aloofness from them, or rather theirs from her. They had entered existence entirely outside her chalk-line. She and they walked on parallels which to all eternity could never meet.

It therefore came to pass that, although she had in the secret depths of her being bemoaned her childlessness, and had been conscious of yearnings and longings which were agonies, when Doctor Sturtevant, after the poor young unknown mother had been laid away in the Fairbridge cemetery, proposed that they should adopt the bereft little one, she rebelled.

"If he were a white baby, I wouldn't object that I know of," said she, "but I can't have this kind. I can't make up my mind to it, Edward."

"But, Maria, the child is white. He may not

be European, but he is white. That is, while of course he has a dark complexion and dark eyes and hair, he is as white, in a way, as any child in Fairbridge, and he will be a beautiful boy. Moreover, we have every reason to believe that he was born in wedlock. There was a ring on a poor string of a ribbon on the mother's neck, and there was a fragment of a letter which Von Rosen managed to make out. He thinks that the poor child was married to another child of her own race. The boy is all right and he will be a fine little fellow."

"It is of no use," said Maria Sturtevant. "I can't make up my mind to adopt a baby, that belonged to that kind of people. I simply can not, Edward."

Sturtevant gave up the matter for the time being. The baby remained at Von Rosen's under the care of Mrs. Bestwick, and Jane Riggs, but when it was a month old, the doctor persuaded his wife to go over and see it. Maria Sturtevant gazed at the tiny scrap of humanity curled up in Jane Riggs' darning basket, the old-young face creased as softly as a rosebud, with none of its beauty, but with a

compelling charm. She watched the weak motion of the infinitesimal legs and arms beneath the soft smother of wrappings, and her heart pained her with longing, but she remained firm.

"It is no use, Edward," she said, when they had returned to Von Rosen's study. "I can't make up my mind to adopt a baby coming from such queer people." Then she was confronted by a stare of blank astonishment from Von Rosen, and also from Jane Riggs.

Jane Riggs spoke with open hostility. "I don't know that anybody has asked anybody to adopt our baby," said she.

Von Rosen laughed, but he also blushed. He spoke rather stammeringly. "Well, Sturtevant," said he, "the fact is, Jane and I have talked it over, and she thinks she can manage, and he seems a bright little chap, and—I have about made up my mind to keep him myself."

"He is going to be baptised as soon as he is big enough to be taken out of my darning basket," said Jane Riggs with defiance, but Mrs. Sturtevant regarded her with relief.

"I dare say he will be a real comfort to you," she said, "even if he does come from

such queer stock." Her husband looked at Von Rosen and whistled under his breath.

"People will talk," he said aside.

"Let them," returned Von Rosen. He was experiencing a strange new joy of possession, which no possibility of ridicule could daunt. However, his joy was of short duration. The baby was a little over three months old, and had been promoted to a crib, and a perambulator, had been the unconscious recipient of many gifts from the women of Von Rosen's parish, and of many calls from admiring little girls. Jane had scented the danger. She came home from marketing one morning, quite pale, and could hardly speak when she entered Von Rosen's study.

"There's an outlandish young man around here," said she, "and you had better keep that baby close."

Von Rosen laughed. "Those people are always about," he said. "You have no reason to be nervous, Jane. There is hardly a chance he has anything to do with the baby, and in any case, he would not be likely to burden himself with the care of it."

"Don't you be too sure," said Jane stoutly, "a baby like that!"

Jane, much against her wishes, was obliged to go out that afternoon, and Von Rosen was left alone with the baby with the exception of a little nurse girl who had taken the place of Mrs. Bestwick. Then it was that the Syrian man, he was no more than a boy, came. Von Rosen did not at first suspect. The Syrian spoke very good English, and he was a Christian. So he told Von Rosen. Then he also told him that the dead girl had been his wife, and produced letters signed with the name which those in her possession had borne. Von Rosen was convinced. There was something about the boy with his haughty, almost sullen, oriental manner which bore the stamp of truth. However, when he demanded only the suit-case which his dead wife had brought when she came to the house, Von Rosen was relieved. He produced it at once, and his wonder and disgust mounted to fever heat, when that Eastern boy proceeded to take out carefully the gauds of feminine handiwork which it contained, and press them upon Von Rosen at ex-

orbitant prices. Von Rosen was more incensed than he often permitted himself to be. He ordered the boy from the house, and he departed with strong oaths, and veiled and intricate threats after the manner of his subtle race, and when Jane Riggs came home, Von Rosen told her.

"I firmly believe the young rascal was that poor girl's husband, and the boy's father," he said.

"Didn't he ask to have the baby?"

"Never mentioned such a thing. All he wanted was the article of value which the poor girl left here."

Jane Riggs also looked relieved. "Outlandish people are queer," she said.

But the next morning she rushed into Von Rosen's room when he had barely finished dressing, sobbing aloud like a child, her face rigidly convulsed with grief, and her hands waving frantically with no effort to conceal it.

CHAPTER IV

The little Syrian baby had disappeared. Nobody had reckoned with the soft guile of a race as supple and silent as to their real intentions as cats. There was a verandah column wound with a massive wistaria vine near the window of the baby's room. The little nurse girl went home every night, and Jane Riggs was a heavy sleeper. When she had awakened, her first glance had been into the baby's crib. Then she sprang, and searched with hungry hands. The little softly indented nest was not warm, the child had been gone for some hours, probably had been taken during the first and soundest sleep of the household. Jane's purse, and her gold breast pin, had incidentally been taken also. When she gave the alarm to Von Rosen, a sullen, handsome Syrian boy was trudging upon an unfrequented road, which led circuitously to the City, and he carried a suit-case, but it was held apart, by some of the Eastern embroideries used as wedges, before strapping,

and from that came the querulous wail of a baby squirming uncomfortably upon drawn work centre pieces, and crepe kimonas. Now and then the boy stopped and spoke to the baby in a lovely gentle voice. He promised it food, and shelter soon in his own soft tongue. He was carrying it to his wife's mother, and sullen as he looked and was, and thief as he was, love for his own swayed him, and made him determined to hold it fast. Von Rosen made all possible inquiries. He employed detectives but he never obtained the least clue to the whereabouts of the little child. He, however, although he grieved absurdly, almost as absurdly as Jane, had a curious sense of joy over the whole. Life in Fairbridge had, before birth and death entered his home, been so monotonous, that he was almost stupefied. Here was a thread of vital gold and flame, although it had brought pain with it. When Doctor Sturtevant condoled with him, he met with an unexpected response. "I feel for you, old man. It was a mighty unfortunate thing that it happened in your house, now that this has come of it," he said.

"I am very glad it happened, whatever came of it," said Von Rosen. "It is something to have had in my life. I wouldn't have missed it."

Fairbridge people, who were on the whole a good-natured set, were very sympathetic, especially the women. Bessy Dicky shed tears when talking to Mrs. Sturtevant about the disappearance of the baby. Mrs. Sturtevant was not very responsive.

"It may be all for the best," she said. "Nobody can tell how that child would have turned out. He might have ended by killing Mr. von Rosen." Then she added with a sigh that she hoped his poor mother had been married.

"Why, of course she was since there was a baby," said Bessy Dicky. Then she rose hastily with a blush because Doctor Sturtevant's motor could be heard, and took her leave.

Doctor Sturtevant had just returned from a call upon Margaret Edes, who had experienced a very severe disappointment, coming as it did after another very successful meeting of the Zenith Club at Daisy Shaw's, who

had most unexpectedly provided a second cousin who recited monologues wonderfully. Wilbur had failed in his attempt to secure Lydia Greenway for Margaret's star-feature. The actress had promised, but had been suddenly attacked with a very severe cold which had obliged her to sail for Europe a week earlier than she had planned. Margaret had been quite ill, but Doctor Sturtevant gave her pain pellets with the result that late in the afternoon she sat on her verandah in a fluffy white tea gown, and then it was that little Annie Eustace came across the street, and sat with her. Annie was not little. Although slender, she was, in fact, quite tall and wide shouldered and there was something about her which seemed to justify the use of the diminutive adjective. Possibly it was her face, which was really small and very pretty, with perfect cameo-like features and an odd, deprecating, almost painfully humble expression. It was the face of a creature entirely capable of asking an enemy's pardon for an injury inflicted upon herself. In reality, Annie Eustace had very much that attitude of soul. She always

considered the wrong as her natural place, and, in fact, would not have been comfortable elsewhere, although she suffered there. And yet, little Annie Eustace was a gifted creature. There was probably not a person in Fairbridge who had been so well endowed by nature, but her environment and up-bringing had been unfortunate. If Annie's mother had lived, the daughter might have had more spirit, but she had died when Annie was a baby, and the child had been given over to the tyranny of two aunts, and a grandmother. As for her father, he had never married again, but he had never paid much attention to her. He had been a reserved, silent man, himself under the sway of his mother and sisters. Charles Eustace had had an obsession to the effect that the skies of his own individual sphere would fall to his and his child's destruction, if his female relatives deserted him, and that they had threatened to do, upon the slightest sign of revolt. Sometimes Annie's father had regarded her wistfully and wondered within himself if it were quite right for a child to be so entirely governed, but his own spirit of yielding made

it impossible for him to realise the situation. Obedience had been little Annie Eustace's first lesson taught by the trio, who to her represented all government, in her individual case.

Annie Eustace obeyed her aunts, and grandmother (her father had been dead for several years), but she loved only three,—two were women, Margaret Edes and Alice Mendon; the other was a man, and the love was not confessed to her own heart.

This afternoon Annie wore an ugly green gown, which was, moreover, badly cut. The sleeves were too long below the elbow, and too short above, and every time she moved an arm they hitched uncomfortably. The neck arrangement was exceedingly unbecoming, and the skirt not well hung. The green was of the particular shade which made her look yellow. As she sat beside Margaret and embroidered assiduously, and very unskilfully, some daisies on a linen centre-piece, the other woman eyed her critically.

"You should not wear that shade of green, if you will excuse my saying so, dear," she remarked presently.

Annie regarded her with a charming, loving smile. She would have excused her idol for saying anything. "I know it is not very becoming," she agreed sweetly.

"Becoming," said Margaret a trifle viciously. She was so out of sorts about her failure to secure Lydia Greenway that she felt a great relief in attacking little Annie Eustace.

"Becoming," said she. "It actually makes you hideous. That shade is impossible for you and why,—I trust you will not be offended, you know it is for your own good, dear,—why do you wear your hair in that fashion?"

"I am afraid it is not very becoming," said Annie with the meekness of those who inherit the earth. She did not state that her aunt Harriet had insisted that she dress her hair in that fashion. Annie was intensely loyal.

"Nobody," said Margaret, "unless she were as beautiful as Helen of Troy, should wear her hair that way, and not look a fright."

Annie Eustace blushed, but it was not a distressed blush. When one has been downtrodden one's whole life, one becomes accustomed to it, and besides she loved the down-treader.

"Yes," said she. "I looked at myself in my glass just before I came and I thought I did not look well."

"Hideous," said Margaret.

Annie smiled agreement and looked pretty, despite the fact that her hair was strained tightly back, showing too much of her intellectual forehead, and the colour of her gown killed all the pink bloom lights in her face. Annie Eustace had a beautiful soul and it showed forth triumphant over all bodily accessories, in her smile.

"You are not doing that embroidery at all well," said Margaret.

Annie laughed. "I know it," she said with a sort of meek amusement. "I don't think I ever can master long and short stitch."

"Why on earth do you attempt it then?"

"Everybody embroiders," replied Annie. She did not state that her grandmother had made taking the embroidery a condition of her call upon her friend.

Margaret continued to regard her. She was finding a species of salve for her own disappointment in this irritant applied to another.

"What does make you wear that hair ring?" said she.

"It was a present," replied Annie humbly, but she for the first time looked a little disturbed. That mourning emblem with her father's and mother's, and a departed sister's hair in a neat little twist under a small crystal, grated upon her incessantly. It struck her as a species of ghastly sentiment, which at once distressed, and impelled her to hysterical mirth.

"A present," repeated Margaret. "If anybody gave me such a present as that, I would never wear it. It is simply in shocking bad taste."

"I sometimes fear so," said Annie. She did not state that her Aunt Jane never allowed her to be seen in public without that dismal adornment.

"You are a queer girl," said Margaret, and she summed up all her mood of petty cruelty and vicarious revenge in that one word "queer."

However, little Annie Eustace only smiled as if she had been given a peculiarly acceptable

present. She was so used to being underrated, that she had become in a measure immune to criticism, and besides criticism from her adored Mrs. Edes was even a favour. She took another bungling stitch in the petal of a white floss daisy.

Margaret felt suddenly irritated. All this was too much like raining fierce blows upon a down pillow.

"Do, for goodness sake, Annie Eustace, stop doing that awful embroidery if you don't want to drive me crazy," said she.

Then Annie looked at Margaret, and she was obviously distressed and puzzled. Her grandmother had enjoined it upon her to finish just so many of these trying daisies before her return and yet, on the other hand, here was Margaret, her adorable Margaret, forbidding her to work, and, moreover, Margaret in such an irritable mood, with that smooth brow of hers frowning, and that sweet voice, which usually had a lazy trickle like honey, fairly rasping, was as awe-inspiring as her grandmother. Annie Eustace hesitated for a second. Her grandmother had commanded. Margaret Edes had

commanded. The strongest impulse of her whole being was obedience, but she loved Margaret, and she did not love her grandmother. She had never confessed such a horror to herself, but one does not love another human being whose main aim toward one is to compress, to stiffen, to make move in a step with itself. Annie folded up the untidy embroidery. As she did so, she dropped her needle and also her thimble. The needle lay glittering beside her chair, the thimble rolled noiselessly over the trailing fold of her muslin gown into the folds of Margaret's white silk. Margaret felt an odd delight in that. Annie was careless, and she was dainty, and she was conscious of a little pleasurable preening of her own soul-plumage.

Margaret said nothing about the thimble and needle. Annie sat regarding her with a sort of expectation, and the somewhat mussy little parcel of linen lay in her lap. Annie folded over it her very slender hands, and the horrible hair ring was in full evidence.

Margaret fixed her eyes upon it. Annie quickly placed the hand which wore it under

the other. Then she spoke, since Margaret did not, and she said exactly the wrong thing. The being forced continually into the wrong, often has the effect of making one quite innocently take the first step in that direction even if no force be used.

"I hear that the last meeting of the Zenith Club was unusually interesting," said little Annie Eustace, and she could have said nothing more hapless to Margaret Edes in her present mood. Quite inadvertently, she herself became the irritant party. Margaret actually flushed. "I failed to see anything interesting whatever about it, myself," said she tartly.

Annie offended again. "I heard that Mrs. Sarah Joy Snyder's address was really very remarkable," said she.

"It was simply a very stupid effort to be funny," returned Margaret. "Sometimes women will laugh because they are expected to, and they did that afternoon. Everything was simply cut and dried. It always is at Mrs. George B. Slade's. I never knew a woman so absolutely destitute of originality."

Annie looked helplessly at Margaret. She

could say no more unless she contradicted. Margaret continued. She felt that she could no longer conceal her own annoyance, and she was glad of this adoring audience of one.

"I had planned something myself for the next meeting, something which has never been done," said she, "something new, and stimulating."

"Oh, how lovely!" cried Annie.

"But of course, like all really clever plans for the real good and progress of a club like ours, something has to come up to prevent," said Margaret.

"Oh, what?"

"Well, I had planned to have Lydia Greenway, you know she is really a great artist, come to the next meeting and give dramatic recitations."

"Oh, would she?" gasped Annie Eustace.

"Of course, it would have meant a large pecuniary outlay," said Margaret, "but I was prepared, quite prepared, to make some sacrifices for the good of the club, but, why, you must have read it in the papers, Annie."

Annie looked guiltily ignorant.

"I really do not see how you contrive to exist without keeping more in touch with the current events," said Margaret.

Annie looked meekly culpable, although she was not. Her aunts did not approve of newspapers, as containing so much information, so much cheap information concerning the evil in the world, especially for a young person like Annie, and she was not allowed to read them, although she sometimes did so surreptitiously.

"It was in all the papers," continued Margaret, with her censorious air. "Lydia Greenway was obliged to leave unexpectedly and go to the Riveria. They fear tuberculosis. She sailed last Saturday."

"I am so sorry," said Annie. Then she proceeded to elaborate her statement in exactly the wrong way. She said how very dreadful it would be if such a talented young actress should fall a victim of such a terrible disease, and what a loss she would be to the public, whereas all that Margaret Edes thought should be at all considered by any true friend of her own was her own particular loss.

"For once the Zenith Club would have had a

meeting calculated to take Fairbridge women out of their rut in which people like Mrs. Slade and Mrs. Sturtevant seem determined to keep them," returned Margaret testily. Annie stared at her. Margaret often said that it was the first rule of her life never to speak ill of any one, and she kept the letter of it as a rule.

"I am so sorry," said Annie. Then she added with more tact. "It would have been such a wonderful thing for us all to have had Lydia Greenway give dramatic recitals to us. Oh, Margaret, I can understand how much it would have meant."

"It would have meant progress," said Margaret. She looked imperiously lovely, as she sat there all frilled about with white lace and silk with the leaf-shadows playing over the slender whiteness. She lifted one little hand tragically. "Progress," she repeated. "Progress beyond Mrs. George B. Slade's and Mrs. Sturtevant's and Miss Bessy Dicky's, and that is precisely what we need."

Annie Eustace gazed wistfully upon her friend. "Yes," she agreed, "you are quite right, Margaret. Mrs. Slade and Mrs. Sturte-

vant and poor Bessy Dicky and all the other members are very good, and we think highly of them, but I too feel that we all travel in a rut sometimes. Perhaps we all walk too much the same way." Then suddenly Annie burst into a peal of laughter. She had a sense of humour which was startling. It was the one thing which environment had not been able to subdue, or even produce the effect of submission. Annie Eustace was easily amused. She had a scent for the humorous like a hound's for game, and her laugh was irrepressible.

"What on earth are you laughing at now?" inquired Margaret Edes irritably.

"I was thinking," Annie replied chokingly, "of some queer long-legged birds I saw once in a cage in a park. I really don't know whether they were ibises or cranes, or survivals of species, but anyway, the little long-legged ones all walked just the same way in a file behind a tall long-legged one, who walked precisely in the same way, and all of a sudden, I seemed to see us all like that. Only you are not in the least like that tall, long-legged bird, Margaret, and you are the president of the Zenith Club."

Margaret surveyed Annie with cool displeasure. "I," said she, "see nothing whatever to laugh at in the Zenith Club, if you do."

"Oh, Margaret, I don't!" cried Annie.

"To my mind, the Zenith Club is the one institution in this little place which tends to advancement and mental improvement."

"Oh, Margaret, I think so too, you know I do," said Annie in a shocked voice. "And my heart was almost broken because I had to miss that last meeting on account of grandmother's having such a severe cold."

"The last meeting was not very much to miss," said Margaret, for Annie had again said the wrong thing.

Annie, however, went on eagerly and unconsciously. She was only aware that she was being accused of disloyalty, or worse, of actually poking fun, when something toward which she felt the utmost respect and love and admiration was concerned.

"Margaret, you know," she cried, "you know how I feel toward the Zenith Club. You must know what it means to me. It really does take me out of my little narrow place in life as

nothing else does. I cannot tell you what an inspiration it really is to me. Oh, Margaret, you know!"

Margaret nodded in stiff assent. As a matter of fact, she *did* know. The Zenith Club of Fairbridge did mean very much, very much indeed, to little Annie Eustace. Nowhere else did she meet *en masse* others of her kind. She did not even go to church for the reason that her grandmother did not believe in church going at all and wished her to remain with her. One aunt was Dutch Reformed and the other Baptist; and neither ever missed a service. Annie remained at home Sundays, and read aloud to her grandmother, and when both aunts were in the midst of their respective services, and the cook, who was intensely religious, engaged in preparing dinner, she and her old grandmother played pinocle. However, although Annie played cards very well, it was only with her relatives. She had never been allowed to join the Fairbridge Card Club. She never attended a play in the city, because Aunt Jane considered plays wicked. It was in reality doubtful if she would have been per-

mitted to listen to Lydia Greenway, had that person been available. Annie's sole large recreation was the Zenith Club, and it meant, as she had said, much to her. It was to the stifled young heart as a great wind of stimulus which was for the strengthening of her soul. Whatever the Zenith Club of Fairbridge was to others, it was very much worth while for little Annie Eustace. She wrote papers for it, which were astonishing, although her hearers dimly appreciated the fact, not because of dulness, but because little Annie had written them, and it seemed incredible to Fairbridge women that little Annie Eustace whom they had always known, and whose grandmother and aunts they knew, could possibly write anything remarkable. It was only Alice Mendon who listened with a frown of wonder, and intent eyes upon the reader. When she came home upon one occasion, she remarked to her aunt, Eliza Mendon, and her cousin, Lucy Mendon, that she had been impressed by Annie Eustace's paper, but both women only stared and murmured assent. The cousin was very much older than Alice,

and both she and her mother were of a placid, reflective type. They got on very well with Alice, but sometimes she had a queer weariness from always seeing herself and her own ideas in them instead of their own. And she was not in the least dictatorial. She would have preferred open, antagonistic originality, but she got a surfeit of clear, mirror-like peace.

She was quite sure that they would quote her opinion of Annie Eustace's paper, but that did not please her. Later on she spoke to Annie herself about it. "Haven't you something else written that you can show me?" She had even suggested the possibility, the desirability, of Annie's taking up a literary career, but she had found the girl very evasive, even secretive, and had never broached the subject again.

As for Margaret Edes, she had never fairly listened to anything which anybody except herself had written, unless it had afforded matter for discussion, and the display of her own brilliancy. Annie's productions were so modestly conclusive as to apparently afford no standing ground for argument. In her heart, Margaret regarded them as she regarded Annie's person-

ality, with a contempt so indifferent that it was hardly contempt.

She proceeded exactly as if Annie had not made such a fervent disclaimer. "The Zenith Club is the one and only thing which lifts Fairbridge, and the women of Fairbridge, above the common herd," said she majestically.

"Don't I know it? Oh, Margaret, don't I know it," cried the other with such feverish energy that Margaret regarded her wonderingly. For all her exploiting of the Zenith Club of Fairbridge, she herself, unless she were the main figure at the helm, could realise nothing in it so exceedingly inspiring, but it was otherwise with Annie. It was quite conceivable that had it not been for the Zenith Club, she never would have grown to her full mental height. Annie Eustace had a mind of the sequential order. By subtle processes, unanalysable even by herself, even the record of Miss Bessy Dicky started this mind upon momentous trains of thought. Unquestionably the Zenith Club acted as a fulminate for little Annie Eustace. To others it might seem, during some of the sessions, as a pathetic attempt of village

women to raise themselves upon tiptoes enough to peer over their centuries of weedy feminine growth; an attempt which was as futile, and even ridiculous, as an attempt of a cow to fly. But the Zenith Club justified its existence nobly in the result of little Annie Eustace, if in no other, and it, no doubt, justified itself in others. Who can say what that weekly gathering meant to women who otherwise would not move outside their little treadmill of household labour, what uplifting, if seemingly futile grasps at the great outside of life? Let no one underrate the Women's Club until the years have proven its uselessness.

"I am so sorry about Lydia Greenway," said Annie, and this time she did not irritate Margaret.

"It does seem as if one were simply doomed to failure every time one really made an effort to raise standards," said Margaret.

Then it was that Annie all unconsciously sowed a seed which led to strange, and rather terrifying results. "It would be nice," said little Annie, "if we could get Miss Martha Wallingford to read a selection from *Hearts*

Astray at a meeting of the club. I read a few nights ago, in a paper I happened to pick up at Alice's, that she was staying in New York at the Hollingsgate. Her publishers were to give her a dinner last night, I believe."

Margaret Edes started. "I had not seen that," she said. Then she added in a queer brooding fashion, "That book of hers had an enormous sale. I suppose her publishers feel that they owe it to her to give her a good time in New York. Then, too, it will advertise *Hearts Astray.*"

"Did you like the book?" asked Annie rather irrelevantly. Margaret did not reply. She was thinking intently. "It would be a great feature for the club if we could induce her to give a reading," she said at length.

"I don't suppose it would be possible," replied Annie. "You know they say she never does such things, and is very retiring. I read in the papers that she was, and that she refused even to speak a few words at the dinner given in her honour."

"We might ask her," said Margaret.

"I am sure that she would not come. The

paper stated that she had had many invitations to Women's Clubs and had refused. I don't think she ought because she might be such a help to other women."

Margaret said nothing. She leaned back, and, for once, her face was actually contracted with thought to the possible detriment of its smooth beauty.

A clock in the house struck, and at the same time Maida and Adelaide raced up the steps, followed by gleeful calls from two little boys on the sidewalk.

"Where have you been?" asked Margaret. Then she said without waiting for a reply, "If Martha Wallingford would come, I should prefer that to Lydia Greenway."

Maida and Adelaide, flushed and panting, and both with mouths full of candy, glanced at their mother, then Maida chased Adelaide into the house, their blue skirts flitting out of sight like blue butterfly wings.

Annie Eustace rose. She had noticed that neither Maida nor Adelaide had greeted her, and thought them rude. She herself had been most carefully trained concerning manners of

incoming and outgoing. She, however, did not care. She had no especial love for children unless they were small and appealing because of helplessness.

"I must go," she said. "It is six o'clock, supper will be ready." She glanced rather apprehensively as she spoke at the large white house, not two minutes' walk distant across the street.

"How very delightful it is to be as punctual as your people are," said Margaret. "Goodbye, Annie." She spoke abstractedly, and Annie felt a little hurt. She loved Margaret, and she missed her full attention when she left her. She passed down the walk between Margaret's beautifully kept Japanese trees, and gained the sidewalk. Then a sudden recollection filled her with dismay. She had promised her grandmother to go to the post-office before returning. An important business letter was expected. Annie swept the soft tail of her muslin into a little crushed ball, and ran, her slender legs showing like those of a young bird beneath its fluff of plumage. She realized the necessity of speed, of great speed, for the post-

office was a quarter of a mile away, and the Eustace family supped at five minutes past six, with terrible and relentless regularity. Why it should have been five minutes past instead of upon the stroke of the hour, Annie had never known, but so it was. It was as great an offence to be a minute too early as a minute too late at the Eustace house, and many a maid had been discharged for that offence, her plea that the omelet was cooked and would fall if the meal be delayed, being disregarded. Poor Annie felt that she must hasten. She could not be dismissed like the maid, but something equally to be dreaded would happen, were she to present herself half a minute behind time in the dining-room. There they would be seated, her grandmother, her Aunt Harriet, and her Aunt Jane. Aunt Harriet behind the silver tea service; Aunt Jane behind the cut glass bowl of preserves; her grandmother behind the silver butter dish, and on the table would be the hot biscuits cooling, the omelet falling, the tea drawing too long and all because of her. There was tremendous etiquette in the Eustace family. Not a cup of tea would Aunt

Harriet pour, not a spoon would Aunt Jane dip into the preserves, not a butter ball would her grandmother impale upon the little silver fork. And poor Hannah, the maid, white aproned and capped, would stand behind Aunt Harriet like a miserable conscious graven image. Therefore Annie ran, and ran, and it happened that she ran rather heedlessly and blindly and dropped her mussy little package of fancy work, and Karl von Rosen, coming out of the parsonage, saw it fall and picked it up rather gingerly, and called as loudly as was decorous after the flying figure, but Annie did not hear and Von Rosen did not want to shout, neither did he want, or rather think it advisable, to run, therefore he followed holding the linen package well away from him, as if it were a disagreeable insect. He had never seen much of Annie Eustace. Now and then he called upon one of her aunts, who avowed her preference for his religious denomination, but if he saw Annie at all, she was seated engaged upon some such doubtfully ornamental or useful task, as the specimen which he now carried. Truth to say, he had scarcely noticed Annie

Eustace at all. She had produced the effect of shrinking from observation under some subtle shadow of self-effacement. She was in reality a very rose of a girl, loving and sweet, and withal wonderfully endowed; but this human rose, dwelt always for Karl von Rosen, in the densest of bowers through which her beauty and fragrance of character could not penetrate his senses. Undoubtedly also, although his masculine intelligence would have scouted the possibility of such a thing, Annie's dull, ill-made garb served to isolate her. She also never came to church. That perfect little face with its expression of strange insight, must have aroused his attention among his audience. But there was only the Aunt Harriet Eustace, an exceedingly thin lady, present and always attired in rich blacks. Karl von Rosen to-day walking as rapidly as became his dignity, in pursuit of the young woman, was aware that he hardly felt at liberty to accost her with anything more than the greeting of the day. He eyed disapprovingly the parcel which he carried. It was a very dingy white, and greyish threads dangled from it. Von Rosen thought

it a most unpleasant thing, and reflected with mild scorn and bewilderment concerning the manner of mind which could find amusement over such employment, for he divined that it was a specimen of feminine skill, called fancy work.

Annie Eustace ran so swiftly with those long agile legs of hers that he soon perceived that interception upon her return, and not overtaking, must ensue. He did not gain upon her at all, and he began to understand that he was making himself ridiculous to possible observers in windows. He therefore slackened his pace, and met Annie upon her return. She had a letter in her hand and was advancing with a headlong rush, and suddenly she attracted him. He surrendered the parcel. "Thank you very much," said Annie, "but I almost wish you had not found it."

Von Rosen stared at her. Was she rude after all, this very pretty girl, who was capable of laughter. "You would not blame me if you had to embroider daisies on that dreadful piece of linen," said Annie with a rueful glance at the dingy package.

Von Rosen smiled kindly at her. "I don't blame you at all," he replied. "I can understand it must be a dismal task to embroider daisies."

"It is, Mr. von Rosen—" Annie hesitated.

"Yes," said Von Rosen encouragingly.

"You know I never go to church."

"Yes," said Von Rosen mendaciously. He really did not know. In future he, however, would.

"Well, I don't go because—" again Annie hesitated, while the young man waited interrogatively.

Then Annie spoke with force. "I would really like to go occasionally," she said, "I doubt if I would always care to."

"No, I don't think you would," assented Von Rosen with a queer delight.

"But I never can because—Grandmother is old and she has not much left in life, you know."

"Of course."

"It is all very well for people to talk about firesides, and knitting work, and peaceful eyes of age fixed upon Heavenly homes," said

Annie, "but all old people are not like that. Grandma hates to knit although she does think I should embroider daisies, and she does like to have me play pinocle with her Sunday mornings, when Aunt Harriet and Aunt Jane are out of the way. It is the only chance she has during the whole week you know because neither Aunt Harriet nor Aunt Jane approves of cards, and poor Grandma is so fond of them, it seems cruel not to play with her the one chance she has."

"I think you are entirely right," said Von Rosen with grave conviction and he was charmed that the girl regarded him as if he had said nothing whatever unusual.

"I have always been sure that it was right," said Annie Eustace, "but I would like sometimes to go to church."

"I really wish you could," said Von Rosen, "and I would make an especial effort to write a good sermon."

"Oh," said Annie, "Aunt Harriet often hears you preach one which she thinks very good."

Von Rosen bowed. Suddenly Annie's shy-

ness, reserve, whatever it was, seemed to overcloud her. The lovely red faded from her cheeks, the light from her eyes. She lost her beauty in a great measure. She bowed stiffly, saying: "I thank you very much, good evening," and passed on, leaving the young man rather dazed, pleased and yet distinctly annoyed, and annoyed in some inscrutable fashion at himself.

Then he heard shouts of childish laughter, and a scamper of childish feet, and Maida and Adelaide Edes rushed past, almost jostling him from the sidewalk. Maida carried a letter, which her mother had written, and dispatched to the last mail. And that letter was destined to be of more importance to Von Rosen than he knew.

As for Annie Eustace, whose meeting with Von Rosen had, after her first lapse into the unconsciousness of mirth, disturbed her, as the meeting of the hero of a dream always disturbs a true maiden who has not lost through many such meetings the thrill of them, she hurried home trembling, and found everything just exactly as she knew it would be.

There sat Aunt Harriet perfectly motionless behind the silver tea service, and although the cosy was drawn over the teapot, the tea seemed to be reproachfully drawing to that extent that Annie could hear it. There sat Aunt Jane behind the cut glass bowl of preserved fruit, with the untouched silver spoon at hand. There sat her grandmother behind the butter plate. There stood Hannah, white capped and white aproned, holding the silver serving tray like a petrified statue of severity, and not one of them spoke, but their silence, their dignified, reproachful silence was infinitely worse than a torrent of invective. How Annie wished they would speak. How she wished that she could speak herself, but she knew better than to even offer an excuse for her tardiness. Well she knew that the stony silence which would meet that would be worse, much worse than this. So she slid into her place opposite her Aunt Jane, and began her own task of dividing into sections the omelet which was quite flat because she was late, and seemed to reproach her in a miserable, low-down sort of fashion.

However, there was in the girl's heart a little

glint of youthful joy, which was unusual. She had met Mr. Von Rosen and had forgotten herself, that is at first, and he had looked kindly at her. There was no foolish hope in little Annie Eustace's heart; there would be no spire of aspiration added to her dreams because of the meeting, but she tasted the sweet of approbation, and it was a tonic which she sorely needed, and which inspired her to self-assertion in a childishly naughty and mischievous way. It was after supper that evening, that Annie strolled a little way down the street, taking advantage of Miss Bessy Dicky's dropping in for a call, to slink unobserved out of her shadowy corner, for the Eustaces were fond of sitting in the twilight. The wind had come up, the violent strong wind which comes out of the south, and Annie walked very near the barberry hedge which surrounded Doctor Sturtevant's grounds, and the green muslin lashed against it to its undoing. When Annie returned, the skirt was devastated and Aunt Harriet decreed that it could not be mended and must be given to the poor Joy children. There were many of those children of a degen-

erate race, living on the outskirts of Fairbridge, and Annie had come to regard them as living effigies of herself, since everything which she had outgrown or injured past repair, fell to them. "There will be enough to make two nice dresses for Charlotte and Minnie Joy," said Aunt Harriet, "and it will not be wasted, even if you have been so careless, Annie."

Annie could see a vision of those two little Joy girls getting about in the remnants of her ghastly muslin, and she shuddered, although with relief.

"You had better wear your cross barred white muslin afternoons now," said Aunt Harriet, and Annie smiled for that was a pretty dress. She smiled still more when Aunt Jane said that now as the cross-barred white was to be worn every day, another dress must be bought, and she mentioned China silk—something which Annie had always longed to own—and blue, dull blue,—a colour which she loved.

Just before she went to bed, Annie stood in the front doorway looking out at the lovely moonlight and the wonderful shadows which transformed the village street, like the wings

of angels, and she heard voices and laughter from the Edes' house opposite. Then Margaret began singing in her shrill piercing voice from which she had hoped much, but which had failed to please, even at the Zenith Club.

Annie adored Margaret, but she shrank before her singing voice. If she had only known what was passing through the mind of the singer after she went to bed that night, she would have shuddered more, for Margaret Edes was planning a possible *coup* before which Annie, in spite of a little latent daring of her own, would have been aghast.

CHAPTER V

The next morning Margaret announced herself as feeling so much better that she thought she would go to New York. She had several errands, she said, and the day was beautiful and the little change would do her good. She would take the train with her husband, but a different ferry, as she wished to go up town. Wilbur acquiesced readily. "It is a mighty fine morning, and you need to get out," he said. Poor Wilbur at this time felt guiltily culpable that he did not own a motor car in which his Margaret might take the air. He had tried to see his way clear toward buying one, but in spite of a certain improvidence, the whole nature of the man was intrinsically honest. He always ended his conference with himself concerning the motor by saying that he could not possibly keep it running, even if he were to manage the first cost, and pay regularly his other bills. He, however, felt it to be a shame to himself that it was so, and experienced a thrill of pos-

itive pain of covetousness, not for himself, but for his Margaret, when one of the luxurious things whirled past him in Fairbridge. He, it was true, kept a very smart little carriage and horse, but that was not as much as Margaret should have. Every time Margaret seemed a little dull, or complained of headache, as she had done lately, he thought miserably of that motor car, which was her right. Therefore when she planned any little trip like that of to-day, he was immeasurably pleased. At the same time he regarded her with a slightly bewildered expression, for in some subtle fashion, her face as she propounded the trifling plan, looked odd to him, and her voice also did not sound quite natural. However, he dismissed the idea at once as mere fancy, and watched proudly the admiring glances bestowed upon her in the Fairbridge station, while they were waiting for the train. Margaret had a peculiar knack in designing costumes which were at once plain and striking. This morning she wore a black China silk, through the thin bodice of which was visible an under silk strewn with gold disks. Her girdle was clasped with a gold

buckle, and when she moved there were slight glimpses of a yellow silk petticoat. Her hat was black, but under the brim was tucked a yellow rose against her yellow hair. Then to finish all, Margaret wore in the lace at her throat, a great brooch of turquoise matrix, which matched her eyes. Her husband realised her as perfectly attired, although he did not in the least understand why. He knew that his Margaret looked a woman of another race from the others in the station, in their tailored skirts, and shirtwaists, with their coats over arm, and their shopping bags firmly clutched. It was a warm morning, and feminine Fairbridge's idea of a suitable costume for a New York shopping trip was a tailored suit, and a shirtwaist, and as a rule, the shirtwaist did not fit. Margaret never wore shirtwaists,—she understood that she was too short unless she combined a white skirt with a waist. Margaret would have broken a commandment with less hesitation than she would have broken the line of her graceful little figure with two violently contrasting colours. Mrs. Sturtevant in a grey skirt and an elaborate white waist, which em-

phasised her large bust, looked ridiculous beside this fair, elegant little Margaret, although her clothes had in reality cost more. Wilbur watched his wife as she talked sweetly with the other woman, and his heart swelled with the pride of possession. When they were on the train and he sat by himself in the smoker, having left Margaret with Mrs. Sturtevant, his heart continued to feel warm with elation. He waited to assist his wife off the train at Jersey City and realised it a trial that he could not cross the river on the same ferry. Margaret despised the tube and he wished for the short breath of sea air which he would get on the Courtland ferry. He glanced after her retreating black skirts with the glimpses of yellow, regretfully, before he turned his back and turned toward his own slip. And he glanced the more regretfully because this morning, with all his admiration of his wife, he had a dim sense of something puzzling which arose like a cloud of mystery between them.

Wilbur Edes sailing across the river had, however, no conception of the change which had begun in his little world. It was only a shake

of the kaleidoscope of an unimportant life, resulting in a different combination of atoms, but to each individual it would be a tremendous event partaking of the nature of a cataclysm. That morning he had seen upon Margaret's charming face an expression which made it seem as the face of a stranger. He tried to dismiss the matter from his mind. He told himself that it must have been the effect of the light or that she had pinned on her hat at a different angle. Women are so perplexing, and their attire alters them so strangely. But Wilbur Edes had reason to be puzzled. Margaret had looked and really was different. In a little while she had become practically a different woman. Of course, she had only developed possibilities which had always been dormant within her, but they had been so dormant, that they had not been to any mortal perception endowed with life. Hitherto Margaret had walked along the straight and narrow way, sometimes, it is true, jostling circumstances and sometimes being jostled by them, yet keeping to the path. Now she had turned her feet into that broad way

wherein there is room for the utmost self which is in us all. Henceforth husband and wife would walk apart in a spiritual sense, unless there should come a revolution in the character of the wife, who was the stepper aside.

Margaret seated comfortably on the ferry boat, her little feet crossed so discreetly that only a glimpse of the yellow fluff beneath was visible, was conscious of a not unpleasurable exhilaration. She might and she might not be about to do something which would place her distinctly outside the pale which had henceforth enclosed her little pleasance of life. Were she to cross that pale, she felt that it might be distinctly amusing. Margaret was not a wicked woman, but virtue, not virtue in the ordinary sense of the word, but straight walking ahead according to the ideas of Fairbridge, had come to drive her at times to the verge of madness. Then, too, there was always that secret terrible self-love and ambition of hers, never satisfied, always defeated by petty weapons. Margaret, sitting as gracefully as a beautiful cat, on the ferry boat that morning realised the vindictive working of her claws,

and her impulse to strike at her odds of life, and she derived therefrom an unholy exhilaration.

She got her taxicab on the other side and leaned back, catching frequent glances of admiration, and rode pleasurably to the regal up-town hotel which was the home of Miss Martha Wallingford, while in the city. She, upon her arrival, entered the hotel with an air which caused a stir among bell boys. Then she entered a reception room and sat down, disposing herself with slow grace. Margaret gazed about her and waited. There were only three people in the room, one man and two ladies, one quite young—a mere girl—the other from the resemblance and superior age, evidently her mother. The man was young and almost vulgarly well-groomed. He had given a glance at Margaret as she entered, a glance of admiration tempered with the consideration that in spite of her grace and beauty, she was probably older than himself. Then he continued to gaze furtively at the young girl who sat demurely, with eyes downcast beneath a soft, wild tangle of dark hair, against which some

pink roses and a blue feather on her hat showed fetchingly. She was very well dressed, evidently a well-guarded young thing from one of the summer colonies. The mother, high corseted, and elegant in dark blue lines, which made only a graceful concession to age, without fairly admitting it, never allowed one glance of the young man's to escape her. She also saw her slender young daughter with every sense in her body and mind.

Margaret looked away from them. The elder woman had given her costume an appreciative, and herself a supercilious glance, which had been met with one which did not seem to recognise her visibility. Margaret was not easily put down by another woman. She stared absently at the ornate and weary decorations of the room. It was handsome, but tiresome, as everybody who entered realised, and as, no doubt, the decorator had found out. It was a ready-made species of room, with no heart in it, in spite of the harmonious colour scheme and really artistic detail.

Presently the boy with the silver tray entered and approached Margaret. The young man

stared openly at her. He began to wonder if she were not younger than he had thought. The girl never raised her downcast eyes; the older woman cast one swift sharp glance at her. The boy murmured so inaudibly that Margaret barely heard, and she rose and followed him as he led the way to the elevator. Miss Wallingford, who was a young Western woman and a rising, if not already arisen literary star, had signified her willingness to receive Mrs. Wilbur Edes in her own private sitting-room. Margaret was successful so far. She had pencilled on her card, "Can you see me on a matter of importance? I am not connected with the Press," and the young woman who esteemed nearly everything of importance, and was afraid of the Press, had agreed at once to see her. Miss Martha Wallingford was staying in the hotel with an elderly aunt, against whose rule she rebelled in spite of her youth and shyness, which apparently made it impossible for her to rebel against anybody, and the aunt had retired stiffly to her bedroom when her niece said positively that she would see her caller.

"You don't know who she is and I promised your Pa when we started that I wouldn't let you get acquainted with folks unless I knew all about them," the aunt had said and the niece, the risen star, had set her mouth hard. "We haven't seen a soul except those newspaper men, and I know everyone of them is married, and those two newspaper women who told about my sleeves being out of date," said Martha Wallingford, "and this Mrs. Edes may be real nice. I'm going to see her anyhow. We came so late in the season that I believe everybody in New York worth seeing has gone away and this lady has come in from the country and it may lead to my having a good time after all. I haven't had much of a time so far, and you know it, Aunt Susan."

"How you talk, Martha Wallingford! Haven't you been to the theatre every night and Coney Island, and the Metropolitan and—everything there is to see?"

"There isn't much to see in New York anyway except the people," returned the niece. "People are all I care for anyway, and I don't call the people I have seen worth count-

ing. They only came to make a little money out of me and my sleeves. I am glad I got this dress at McCreery's. These sleeves are all right. If this Mrs. Edes should be a newspaper woman, she can't make fun of these sleeves anyway."

"You paid an awful price for that dress," said her aunt.

"I don't care. I got such a lot for my book that I might as well have a little out of it, and you know as well as I do, Aunt Susan, that South Mordan, Illinois, may be a very nice place, but it does not keep up with New York fashions. I really did not have a decent thing to wear when I started. Miss Slocumb did as well as she knew how, but her ideas are about three years behind New York. I didn't know myself, how should I? And you didn't, and as for Pa, he would think everything I had on was stylish if it dated back to the ark. You ought to have bought that mauve silk for yourself. You have money enough; you know you have, Aunt Susan."

"I have money enough, thanks to my dear husband's saving all his life, but it is not going

to be squandered on dress by me, now he is dead and gone."

"I would have bought the dress for you myself, then," said the niece.

"No, thank you," returned the aunt with asperity. "I have never been in the habit of being beholden to you for my clothes and I am not going to begin now. I didn't want that dress anyway. I always hated purple."

"It wasn't purple, it was mauve."

"I call purple, purple, I don't call it anything else!" Then the aunt retreated precipitately before the sound of the opening door and entrenched herself in her bedroom, where she stood listening.

Margaret Edes treated the young author with the respect which she really deserved, for talent she possessed in such a marked degree as to make her phenomenal, and the phenomenal is always entitled to consideration of some sort.

"Miss Wallingford?" murmured Margaret, and she gave an impression of obeisance; this charming elegantly attired lady before the Western girl. Martha Wallingford coloured high with delight and admiration.

"Yes, I am Miss Wallingford," she replied and asked her caller to be seated. Margaret sat down facing her. The young author shuffled in her chair like a school girl. She was an odd combination of enormous egotism and the most painful shyness. She realised at a glance that she herself was provincial and pitifully at a disadvantage personally before this elegant vision, and her personality was in reality more precious to her than her talent.

"I can not tell you what a great pleasure and privilege this is for me," said Margaret, and her blue eyes had an expression of admiring rapture. The girl upon whom the eyes were fixed, blushed and giggled and tossed her head with a sudden show of pride. She quite agreed that it was a pleasure and privilege for Margaret to see her, the author of *Hearts Astray,* even if Margaret was herself so charming and so provokingly well dressed. Miss Martha Wallingford did not hide her light of talent under a bushel with all her shyness, which was not really shyness at all but a species of rather sullen pride and resentment because she was so well aware that she could not do well

the things which were asked of her and had not mastered the art of dress and self poise.

Therefore, Martha, with the delight of her own achievements full upon her face, which was pretty, although untutored, regarded her visitor with an expression which almost made Margaret falter. It was probably the absurd dressing of the girl's hair which restored Margaret's confidence in her scheme. Martha Wallingford actually wore a frizzled bang, very finely frizzled too, and her hair was strained from the nape of her neck, and it seemed impossible that a young woman who knew no better than to arrange her hair in such fashion, should not be amenable to Margaret's plan. The plan, moreover, sounded very simple, except for the little complications which might easily arise. Margaret smiled into the pretty face under the fuzz of short hair.

"My dear Miss Wallingford," said she, "I have come this morning to beg a favour. I hope you will not refuse me, although I am such an entire stranger. If, unfortunately, my intimate friend, Mrs. Fay-Wyman, of whom I assume that you of course know, even if you

have not met her, as you may easily have done, or her daughter, Miss Edith Fay-Wyman, had not left town last week for their country house, Rose-In-Flower, at Hyphen-by-the-Sea, a most delightful spot. Mr. Edes and I have spent several week ends there. I am prevented from spending longer than week ends because I am kept at home by my two darling twin daughters. Mrs. Fay-Wyman is a sweet woman and I do so wish I could have brought her here today. I am sure you would at once fall madly in love with her and also with her daughter, Miss Edith Fay-Wyman, such a sweet girl, and—" But here Margaret was unexpectedly, even rudely interrupted by Miss Wallingford, who looked at her indignantly.

"I never fall in love with women," stated that newly risen literary star abruptly, "why should I? What does it amount to?"

"Oh, my dear," cried Margaret, "when you are a little older you will find that it amounts to very much. There is a soul sympathy, and—"

"I don't think that I care much about soul sympathy," stated Miss Wallingford, who was

beginning to be angrily bewildered by her guest's long sentences, which so far seemed to have no point as far as she herself was concerned.

Margaret started a little. Again the doubt seized her if she were not making a mistake, undertaking more than she could well carry through, for this shy authoress was fast developing unexpected traits. However, Margaret, once she had started, was not easily turned back. She was as persistently clinging as a sweet briar.

"Oh, my dear," she said, and her voice was like trickling honey, "only wait until you are a little older and you will find that you do care, care very, very much. The understanding and sympathy of other women will become very sweet to you. It is so pure and ennobling, so free from all material taint."

"I have seen a great many women who were perfect cats," stated Miss Martha Wallingford.

"Wait until you are older," said Margaret again and her voice seemed fairly dissolving into some spiritual liquid of divine sweetness.

"Wait until you are older, my dear. You are very young, so young to have accomplished a wonderful work which will live."

"Oh, well," said Martha Wallingford, and as she spoke she fixed pitiless shrewd young eyes upon the face of the other woman, which did not show at its best, in spite of veil and the velvety darkness of hat-shadow. This hotel sitting-room was full of garish cross lights. "Oh, well," said Martha Wallingford, "of course, I don't know what may happen if I live to be old, as old as you."

Margaret Edes felt like a photograph proof before the slightest attempt at finish had been made. Those keen young eyes conveyed the impression of convex mirrors. She restrained an instinctive impulse to put a hand before her face, she had an odd helpless sensation before the almost brutal, clear-visioned young thing. Again she shrank a little from her task, again her spirit reasserted itself. She moved and brought her face somewhat more into the shadow. Then she spoke again. She wisely dropped the subject of feminine affinities. She plunged at once into the object of her visit,

which directly concerned Miss Martha Wallingford, and Margaret, who was as astute in her way as the girl, knew that she was entirely right in assuming that Martha Wallingford was more interested in herself than anything else in the world.

"My dear," she said, "I may as well tell you at once why I intruded upon you this morning."

"Please do," said Martha Wallingford.

"As I said before, I deeply regret that I was unable to bring some well-known person, Mrs. Fay-Wyman, for instance, to make us acquainted in due form, but—"

"Oh, I don't care a bit about that," said Martha. "What is it?"

Margaret again started a little. She had not expected anything like this. The mental picture which she had formed of Martha Wallingford, the young literary star, semed to undergo a transformation akin to an explosion, out of which only one feature remained intact—the book, *"Hearts Astray."* If Miss Wallingford had not possessed a firm foundation in that volume, it is entirely possible that Margaret

might have abandoned her enterprise. As it was, after a little gasp she went on.

"I did so wish to assure you in person of my great admiration for your wonderful book," said she. Martha Wallingford made no reply. She had an expression of utter acquiescence in the admiration, also of having heard that same thing so many times, that she was somewhat bored by it. She waited with questioning eyes upon Margaret's face.

"And I wondered," said Margaret, "if you would consider it too informal, if I ventured to beg you to be my guest at my home in Fairbridge next Thursday and remain the week-end, over Sunday. It would give me so much pleasure, and Fairbridge is a charming little village and there are really many interesting people there whom I think you would enjoy, and as for them—!" Margaret gave a slight roll to her eyes—"they would be simply overwhelmed."

"I should like to come very much, thank you," said Martha Wallingford.

Margaret beamed. "Oh, my dear," she cried, "I can not tell you how much joy your

prompt and warm response gives me. And—" Margaret looked about her rather vaguely, "you are not alone here, of course. You have a maid, or perhaps, your mother—"

"My Aunt Susan is with me," said Miss Wallingford, "but there is no use inviting her. She hates going away for a few days. She says it is just as much trouble packing as it would be to go for a month. There is no use even thinking of her, but I shall be delighted to come."

Margaret hesitated. "May I not have the pleasure of being presented to your aunt?" she inquired.

"Aunt Susan is out shopping," lied Miss Martha Wallingford. Aunt Susan was clad in a cotton crepe wrapper, and Martha knew that she would think it quite good enough for her to receive anybody in, and that she could not convince her to the contrary. It was only recently that Martha herself had become converted from morning wrappers, and the reaction was violent. "The idea of a woman like this Mrs. Edes seeing Aunt Susan in that awful pink crepe wrapper!" she said to herself. She

hoped Aunt Susan was not listening, and would not make a forcible entry into the room. Aunt Susan in moments of impulse was quite capable of such coups. Martha glanced rather apprehensively toward the door leading into the bedroom but it did not open. Aunt Susan was indeed listening and she was rigid with indignation, but in truth, she did not want to accompany her niece upon this projected visit, and she was afraid of being drawn into such a step should she present herself. Aunt Susan did dislike making the effort of a visit for a few days only. Martha had told the truth. It was very hot, and the elder woman was not very strong. Moreover, she perceived that Martha did not want her and there would be the complication of kicking against the pricks of a very determined character, which had grown more determined since her literary success. In fact, Aunt Susan stood in a slight awe of her niece since that success, for all her revolts which were superficial. Therefore, she remained upon her side of the door which she did not open until the visitor had departed after making definite arrangements concerning trains and meetings.

Then Aunt Susan entered the room with a cloud of pink crepe in her wake.

"Who was that?" she demanded of Martha.

"Mrs. Wilbur Edes," replied her niece, and she aped Margaret to perfection as she added, "and a most charming woman, most charming."

"What did she want you to do?" inquired the aunt.

"Now, Aunt Susan," replied the niece, "what is the use of going over it all? You heard every single thing she said."

"I did hear her ask after me," said the aunt unabashed, "and I heard you tell a lie about it. You told her I had gone out shopping and you knew I was right in the next room."

"I didn't mean to have you come in and see a woman dressed like that one, in your wrapper."

"What is the matter with my wrapper?"

Martha said nothing.

"Are you going?" asked her aunt.

"You know that too."

"I don't know what your Pa would say," remarked Aunt Susan, but rather feebly, for

she had a vague idea that it was her duty to accompany her niece and she was determined to shirk it.

"I don't see how Pa can say much of anything since he is in South Mordan, Illinois, and won't know about it, unless you telegraph, until next week," said Martha calmly. "Now, come along, Aunt Susan, and get dressed. I have made up my mind to get that beautiful white silk dress we looked at yesterday. It did not need any alteration and I think I shall buy that pearl and amethyst necklace at Tiffany's. I know Mrs. Edes will have an evening party and there will be gentlemen, and what is the use of my making so much money out of *Hearts Astray* if I don't have a few things I want? Hurry and get dressed."

"I don't see why this wrapper isn't plenty good enough for a few errands at two or three stores," said the aunt sulkily, but she yielded to Martha's imperative demand that she change her wrapper for her black satin immediately.

Meantime Margaret on her way down town to the ferry was conscious of a slight consternation at what she had done. She understood

that in this young woman was a feminine element which radically differed from any which had come within her ken. She, however, was determined to go on. The next day invitations were issued to the Zenith Club for the following Friday, from four to six, and also one to dinner that evening to four men and five women. She planned for Sunday an automobile ride; she was to hire the car from the Axminister garage, and a high tea afterward. Poor Margaret did all in her power to make her scheme a success, but always she had that chilling doubt of her power. Miss Martha Wallingford had impressed her as being a young woman capable of swift and unexpected movements. She was rather afraid of her but she did not confess her fear to Wilbur. When he inquired genially what kind of a girl the authoress was, she replied: "Oh, charming, of course, but the poor child does not know how to do up her hair." However, when Martha arrived Thursday afternoon and Margaret met her at the station, she, at a glance, discovered that the poor child had discovered how to do up her hair. Some persons' brains work in a

great many directions and Martha Wallingford's was one of them. Somehow or other, she had contrived to dispose of her tightly frizzed fringe, and her very pretty hair swept upward from a forehead which was both intellectual and beautiful. She was well dressed too. She had drawn heavily upon her royalty revenue. She had worked hard and spent a good deal during the short time since Margaret's call, and her brain had served her body well. She stepped across the station platform with an air. She carried no provincial bag—merely a dainty little affair mounted in gold which matched her gown—and she had brought a small steamer trunk.

Margaret's heart sank more and more, but she conducted her visitor to her little carriage and ordered the man to drive home, and when arrived there, showed Martha her room. She had a faint hope that the room might intimidate this Western girl, but instead of intimidation there was exultation. She looked about her very coolly, but afterward, upon her return to East Mordan, Illinois, she bragged a good deal about it. The room was really very

charming and rather costly. The furniture was genuine First Empire; the walls, which were hung with paper covered with garlands of roses, were decorated with old engravings; there was a quantity of Dresden ware and there was a little tiled bathroom. Over a couch in the bedroom lay a kimona of white silk embroidered with pink roses. Afterward Martha made cruel fun of her Aunt's pink crepe and made her buy a kimona.

"Shall I send up my maid to assist you in unpacking, Miss Wallingford?" inquired Margaret, inwardly wondering how the dinner would be managed if the offer were accepted. To her relief, Martha gave her an offended stare. "No, thank you, Mrs. Edes," said she, "I never like servants, especially other peoples', mussing up my things."

When Margaret had gone, Martha looked about her, and her mouth was frankly wide open. She had never seen such exquisite daintiness and it daunted her, although she would have died rather than admit it. She thought of her own bedroom at home in East Mordan, Illinois, with its old black walnut

chamber set and framed photographs and chromos, but she maintained a sort of defiant pride in it even to herself. In Martha Wallingford's character there was an element partaking of the nature of whalebone, yielding, but practically unbreakable, and sometimes wholly unyielding. Martha proceeded to array herself for dinner. She had not a doubt that it would be a grand affair. She therefore did not hesitate about the white silk, which was a robe of such splendour that it might not have disgraced a court. It showed a great deal of her thin, yet pretty girlish neck, and it had a very long train. She had a gold fillet studded with diamonds for her hair—that hair which was now dressed according to the very latest mode—a mode which was startling, yet becoming, and she clasped around her throat the Tiffany necklace, and as a crowning touch, put on long white gloves. When she appeared upon the verandah where Margaret sat dressed in a pretty lingerie gown with Wilbur in a light grey business suit, the silence could be heard. Then there was one double gasp of admiration from Maida and Adelaide in their

white frocks and blue ribbons. They looked at the visitor with positive adoration, but she flushed hotly. She was a very quick-witted girl. Margaret recovered herself, presented Wilbur, and shortly, they went in to dinner, but it was a ghastly meal. Martha Wallingford in her unsuitable splendour was frankly, as she put it afterward, "hopping mad," and Wilbur was unhappy and Margaret aghast, although apparently quite cool. There was not a guest besides Martha. The dinner was simple. Afterward it seemed too farcical to ask a guest attired like a young princess to go out on the verandah and lounge in a wicker chair, while Wilbur smoked. Then Annie Eustace appeared and Margaret was grateful. "Dear Annie," she said, after she had introduced the two girls, "I am so glad you came over. Come in."

"It is pleasanter on the verandah, isn't it?" began Annie, then she caught Margaret's expressive glance at the magnificent white silk. They all sat stiffly in Margaret's pretty drawing-room. Martha said she didn't play bridge and upon Annie's timid suggestion of pinocle,

said she had never heard of it. Wilbur dared not smoke. All that wretched evening they sat there. The situation was too much for Margaret, that past mistress of situations, and her husband was conscious of a sensation approaching terror and also wrath whenever he glanced at the figure in sumptuous white, the figure expressing sulkiness in every feature and motion. Margaret was unmistakably sulky as the evening wore on and nobody came except this other girl of whom she took no notice at all. She saw that she was pretty, her hair badly arranged and she was ill-dressed, and that was enough for her. She felt it to be an insult that these people had invited her and asked nobody to meet her, Martha Wallingford, whose name was in all the papers, attired in this wonderful white gown. When Annie Eustace arose to go, she arose too with a peremptory motion.

"I rather guess I will go to bed," said Martha Wallingford.

"You must be weary," said Margaret.

"I am not tired," said Martha Wallingford, "but it seems to me as dull here as in South

Mordan, Illinois. I might as well go to bed and to sleep as sit here any longer."

When Margaret had returned from the guest room, her husband looked at her almost in a bewildered fashion. Margaret sank wearily into a chair. "Isn't she impossible?" she whispered.

"Did she think there was a dinner party?" Wilbur inquired perplexedly.

"I don't know. It was ghastly. I did not for a moment suppose she would dress for a party, unless I told her, and it is Emma's night off and I could not ask people with only Clara to cook and wait."

Wilbur patted his wife's shoulder comfortingly. "Never mind, dear," he said, "when she gets her chance to do her to-morrow's stunt at your club, she will be all right."

Margaret shivered a little. She had dared say nothing to Martha about that "stunt." Was it possible that she was making a horrible mistake?

The next day, Martha was still sulky but she did not, as Margaret feared, announce her intention of returning at once to New York.

Margaret said quite casually that she had invited a few of the brightest and most interesting people in Fairbridge to meet her that afternoon and Martha became curious, although still resentful, and made no motion to leave. She, however, resolved to make no further mistakes as to costume, and just as the first tide of the Zenith Club broke over Margaret's threshold, she appeared clad in one of her South Mordan, Illinois, gowns. It was one which she had tucked into her trunk in view of foul weather. It was a hideous thing made from two old gowns. It had a garish blue tunic reaching well below the hips and a black skirt bordered with blue. Martha had had it made herself from a pattern after long study of the fashion plates in a Sunday newspaper and the result, although startling, still half convinced her. It was only after she had seen all the members of the Zenith Club seated and had gazed at their costumes, that she realised that she had made a worse mistake than that of the night before. To begin with, the day was very warm and her gown heavy and clumsy. The other ladies were arrayed in lovely ling-

eries or light silks and laces. The Zenith Club was exceedingly well dressed on that day. Martha sat in her place beside her hostess and her face looked like a sulky child's. Her eyelids were swollen, her pouting lips dropped at the corners. She stiffened her chin until it became double. Margaret was inwardly perturbed but she concealed it. The programme went on with the inevitable singing by Miss MacDonald and Mrs. Wells, the playing by Mrs. Jack Evarts, the recitation by Sally Anderson. Margaret had not ventured to omit those features. Then, Mrs. Sturtevant read in a trembling voice a paper on Emerson. Then Margaret sprang her mines. She rose and surveyed her audience with smiling impressiveness. "Ladies," she said, and there was an immediate hush, "Ladies, I have the pleasure, the exceeding pleasure of presenting you to my guest, Miss Martha Wallingford, the author of *Hearts Astray.* She will now speak briefly to you upon her motive in writing and her method of work." There was a soft clapping of hands. Margaret sat down. She was quite pale. Annie Eustace regarded her wonder-

ingly. What had happened to her dear Margaret?

The people waited. Everybody stared at Miss Martha Wallingford who had written that great seller, *Hearts Astray*. Martha Wallingford sat perfectly still. Her eyes were so downcast that they gave the appearance of being closed. Her pretty face looked red and swollen. Everybody waited. She sat absolutely still and made no sign except that of her obstinate face of negation. Margaret bent over her and whispered. Martha did not even do her the grace of a shake of the head.

Everybody waited again. Martha Wallingford sat so still that she gave the impression of a doll made without speaking apparatus. It did not seem as if she could even wink. Then Alice Mendon, who disliked Margaret Edes and had a shrewd conjecture as to the state of affairs, but who was broad in her views, pitied Margaret. She arose with considerable motion and spoke to Daisy Shaw at her right, and broke the ghastly silence, and immediately everything was in motion and refreshments were being passed, but Martha Wallingford,

who had written *Hearts Astray,* was not there to partake of them. She was in her room, huddled in a chair upholstered with cream silk strewn with roses; and she was in one of the paroxysms of silent rage which belonged to her really strong, although undisciplined nature, and which was certainly in this case justified to some degree.

"It was an outrage," she said to herself. She saw through it all now. She had refused to speak or to read before all those women's clubs and now this woman had trapped her, that was the word for it, trapped her.

As she sat there, her sullenly staring angry eyes saw in large letters at the head of a column in a morning paper on the table beside her, "'*The Poor Lady,*' the greatest anonymous novel of the year."

Then she fell again to thinking of her wrongs and planning how she should wreak vengeance upon Margaret Edes.

CHAPTER VI

Martha Wallingford was a young person of direct methods. She scorned subterfuges. Another of her age and sex might have gone to bed with a headache, not she. She sat absolutely still beside her window, quite in full view of the departing members of the Zenith Club, had they taken the trouble to glance in that direction, and some undoubtedly did, and she remained there; presently she heard her hostess's tiny rap on the door. Martha did not answer, but after a repeated rap and wait, Margaret chose to assume that she did, and entered. Margaret knelt in a soft flop of scented lingerie beside the indignant young thing. She explained, she apologised, she begged, she implored Martha to put on that simply ravishing gown which she had worn the evening before; she expatiated at length upon the charms of the people whom she had invited to dinner, but Martha spoke not at all until she was quite ready. Then she said explosively, "I won't."

She was silent after that. Margaret recognised the futility of further entreaties. She went down stairs and confided in Wilbur. "I never saw such an utterly impossible girl," she said; "there she sits and won't get dressed and come down to dinner."

"She is a freak, must be, most of these writer people are freaks," said Wilbur sympathetically. "Poor old girl, and I suppose you have got up a nice dinner too."

"A perfectly charming dinner and invited people to meet her."

"How did she do her stunt this afternoon?"

Margaret flushed. "None too well," she replied.

"Oh, well, dear, I don't see how you are to blame."

"I can say that Miss Wallingford is not well, I suppose," said Margaret, and that was what she did say, but with disastrous results.

Margaret, ravishing in white lace, sprinkled with little gold butterflies, had taken her place at the head of her table. Emma was serving the first course and she was making her little speech concerning the unfortunate indisposi-

tion of her guest of honour when she was suddenly interrupted by that guest herself, an image of sulky wrath, clad in the blue and black costume pertaining to South Mordan, Illinois.

"I am perfectly well. She is telling an awful whopper," proclaimed this amazing girl. "I won't dress up and come to dinner because I won't. She trapped me into a woman's club this afternoon and tried to get me to make a speech without even telling me what she meant to do and now I won't do anything."

With that Miss Wallingford disappeared and unmistakable stamps were heard upon the stairs. One woman giggled convulsively; another took a glass of water and choked. A man laughed honestly. Wilbur was quite pale. Margaret was imperturbable. Karl von Rosen, who was one of the guests and who sat behind Annie Eustace, looked at Margaret with wonder. "Was this the way of women?" he thought. He did not doubt for one minute that the Western girl had spoken the truth. It had been brutal and homely, but it had been the truth. Little Annie Eustace, who had been allowed to come to a dinner party for the first

time in her life and who looked quite charming in an old, much mended, but very fine India muslin and her grandmother's corals, did not, on the contrary, believe one word of Miss Wallingford's.

Her sympathy was all with her Margaret. It was a horrible situation and her dear Margaret was the victim of her own hospitality. She looked across the table at Alice Mendon for another sympathiser, but Alice was talking busily to the man at her right about a new book. She had apparently not paid much attention. Annie wondered how it could have escaped her. That horrid girl had spoken so loudly. She looked up at Von Rosen. "I am so sorry for poor Margaret," she whispered. Von Rosen looked down at her very gently. This little girl's belief in her friend was like a sacred lily, not to be touched or soiled.

"Yes," he said and Annie smiled up at him comfortably. Von Rosen was glad she sat beside him. He thought her very lovely, and there was a subtle suggestion of something besides loveliness. He thought that daintily mended India muslin exquisite, and also the

carved corals,—bracelets on the slender wrists, a necklace—resting like a spray of flowers on the girlish neck, a comb in the soft hair which Annie had arranged becomingly and covered from her aunt's sight with a lace scarf. She felt deceitful about her hair, but how could she help it?

The dinner was less ghastly than could have been expected after the revelation of the guest of honour and the blank consternation of the host, who made no attempt to conceal his state of mind. Poor Wilbur had no society tricks. Alice Mendon, who was quite cognizant of the whole matter, but was broad enough to leap to the aid of another woman, did much. She had quite a talent for witty stories and a goodly fund of them. The dinner went off very well, while Martha Wallingford ate hers from a dinner tray in her room and felt that every morsel was sweetened with righteous revenge.

The next morning she left for New York and Margaret did not attempt to detain her although she had a lunch party planned besides the Sunday festivities. Margaret had had a scene with Wilbur after the departure of the

guests the previous evening. For the first time in her experience, the devoted husband had turned upon his goddess. He had asked, "Was it true, what that girl said?" and Margaret had laughed up at him bewitchingly to no effect. Wilbur's face was very stern.

"My dear," said Margaret, "I knew perfectly well that if I actually asked her to speak or read, she would have refused."

"You have done an unpardonable thing," said the man. "You have betrayed your own sense of honour, your hospitality toward the guest under your roof."

Margaret laughed as she took an ornament from her yellow head but the laugh was defiant and forced. In her heart she bitterly resented her husband's attitude and more bitterly resented the attitude of respect into which it forced her. "It is the very last time I ask a Western authoress to accept my hospitality," said she.

"I hope so," said Wilbur gravely.

That night Karl von Rosen walked home with Annie Eustace. She had come quite unattended, as was the wont of Fairbridge ladies.

That long peaceful Main Street lined with the homes of good people always seemed a safe thoroughfare. Annie was even a little surprised when Von Rosen presented himself and said, "I will walk home with you, Miss Eustace, with your permission."

"But I live a quarter of a mile past your house," said Annie.

Von Rosen laughed. "A quarter of a mile will not injure me," he said.

"It will really be a half mile," said Annie. She wanted very much that the young man should walk home with her, but she was very much afraid of making trouble. She was relieved when he only laughed again and said something about the beauty of the night. It was really a wonderful night and even the eyes of youth, inhabiting it with fairy dreams, were not essential to perceive it.

"What flower scent is that?" asked Von Rosen.

"I think," replied Annie, "that it is wild honeysuckle," and her voice trembled slightly. The perfumed night and the strange presence beside her went to the child's head a bit. The

two walked along under the trees, which cast etching-like shadows in the broad moonlight, and neither talked much. There was scarcely a lighted window in any of the houses and they had a delicious sense of isolation,—the girl and the man awake in a sleeping world. Annie made no further allusion to Miss Wallingford. She had for almost the first time in her life a little selfish feeling that she did not wish to jar a perfect moment even with the contemplation of a friend's troubles. She was very happy walking beside Von Rosen, holding up her flimsy embroidered skirts carefully lest they come in contact with dewy grass. She had been admonished by her grandmother and her aunts so to do and reminded that the frail fabric would not endure much washing however skilful. Between the shadows, her lovely face showed like a white flower as Von Rosen looked down upon it. He wondered more and more that he had never noticed this exquisite young creature before. He did not yet dream of love in connection with her, but he was conscious of a passion of surprised admiration and protectiveness.

"How is it that I have never seen you when I call on your Aunt Harriet?" he asked when he parted with her at her own gate, a stately wrought iron affair in a tall hedge of close trimmed lilac.

"I am generally there, I think," replied Annie, but she was also conscious of a little surprise that she had not paid more attention when this young man, who looked at her so kindly, called. Then came one of her sudden laughs.

"What is it?" asked Von Rosen.

"Oh, nothing, except that the cat is usually there too," replied Annie. Von Rosen looked back boyishly.

"Be sure I shall see you next time and hang the cat," he said.

When Annie was in her room unclasping her corals, she considered how very much mortified and troubled her friend, Margaret Edes, must feel. She recalled how hideous it had all been—that appearance of the Western girl in the dining-room door-way, her rude ways, her flushed angry face. Annie did not dream of blaming Mar-

garet. She was almost a fanatic as far as loyalty to her friends was concerned. She loved Margaret and she had only a feeling of cold dislike and disapprobation toward Miss Wallingford who had hurt Margaret. As for that charge of "trapping," she paid no heed to it whatever. She made up her mind to go and see Margaret the very next day and tell her a secret, a very great secret, which she was sure would comfort her and make ample amends to her for all her distress of the night before. Little Annie Eustace was so very innocent and ignorant of the ways of the world that had her nearest and dearest been able to look into her heart of hearts, they might have been appalled, incredulous and reverent, according to their natures. For instance, this very good, simple young girl who had been born with the light of genius always assumed that her friends would be as delighted at any good fortune of hers as at their own. She fairly fed upon her admiration of Alice Mendon that evening when she had stepped so nobly and tactfully into the rather frightful social breach and saved, if not wholly, the situation.

"Alice was such a dear," she thought, and the thought made her face fairly angelic. Then she recalled how lovely Alice had looked, and her own mobile face took on unconsciously Alice's expression. Standing before her looking-glass brushing out her hair, she saw reflected, not her own beautiful face between the lustrous folds, but Alice's. Then she recalled with pride Margaret's imperturbability under such a trial. "Nobody but Margaret could have carried off such an insult under her own roof too," she thought.

After she was in bed and her lamp blown out and the white moon-beams were entering her open windows like angels, she, after saying her prayers, thought of the three, Margaret, Alice, and Karl von Rosen. Then suddenly a warm thrill passed over her long slender body but it seemed to have its starting point in her soul. She saw very distinctly the young man's dark handsome face, but she thought, "How absurd of me, to see him so distinctly, as distinctly as I see Margaret and Alice, when I love them so much, and I scarcely know Mr. von Rosen." Being brought up by one's imperious grand-

mother and two imperious aunts and being oneself naturally of an obedient disposition and of a slowly maturing temperament, tends to lengthen the long childhood of a girl. Annie was almost inconceivably a child, much more of a child than Maida or Adelaide Edes. They had been allowed to grow like weeds as far as their imagination was concerned, and she had been religiously pruned.

The next afternoon she put on her white barred muslin and obtained her Aunt Harriet's permission to spend an hour or two with Margaret if she would work assiduously on her daisy centre piece, and stepped like a white dove across the shady village street. Annie, unless she remembered to do otherwise, was prone to toe in slightly with her slender feet. She was also prone to allow the tail of her white gown to trail. She gathered it up only when her Aunt called after her. She found Margaret lying indolently in the hammock which was strung across the wide shaded verandah. She was quite alone. Annie had seen with relief Miss Martha Wallingford being driven to the station that morning and the express fol-

lowing with her little trunk. Margaret greeted Annie a bit stiffly but the girl did not notice it. She was so full of her ignorant little plan to solace her friend with her own joy. Poor Annie did not understand that it requires a nature seldom met upon this earth, to be solaced, under disappointment and failure, by another's joy. Annie had made up her mind to say very little to Margaret about what had happened the evening before. Only at first, she remarked upon the beauty of the dinner, then she said quite casually, "Dear Margaret, we were all so sorry for poor Miss Wallingford's strange conduct."

"It really did not matter in the least," replied Margaret coldly. "I shall never invite her again."

"I am sure nobody can blame you," said Annie warmly. "I don't want to say harsh things, you know that, Margaret, but that poor girl, in spite of her great talent, cannot have had the advantage of good home-training."

"Oh, she is Western," said Margaret. "How very warm it is to-day."

"Very, but there is quite a breeze here."

"A hot breeze," said Margaret wearily. "How I wish we could afford a house at the seashore or the mountains. The hot weather does get on my nerves."

A great light of joy came into Annie's eyes. "Oh, Margaret dear," she said, "I can't do it yet but it does look as if some time before long perhaps, I may be able myself to have a house at the seashore. I think Sudbury beach would be lovely. It is always cool there, and then you can come and stay with me whenever you like during the hot weather. I will have a room fitted up for you in your favourite white and gold and it shall be called Margaret's room and you can always come, when you wish."

Margaret looked at the other girl with a slow surprise. "I do not understand," said she.

"Of course, you don't. You know we have only had enough to live here as we have done," said Annie with really childish glee, "but oh, Margaret, you will be so glad. I have not told you before but now I must for I know it will make you so happy, and I know I can trust you never to betray me, for it is a great secret, a very great secret, and it must not be known by

other people at present. I don't know just when it can be known, perhaps never, certainly not now."

Margaret looked at her with indifferent interrogation. Annie did not realise how indifferent. A flood-tide of kindly joyful emotion does not pay much attention to its banks. Annie continued. She looked sweetly excited; her voice rose high above its usual pitch. "You understand, Margaret dear, how it is," she said. "You see I am quite unknown, that is, my name is quite unknown, and it would really hinder the success of a book."

Margaret surveyed her with awakening interest. "A book?" said she.

"Yes, a book! Oh, Margaret, I know it will be hard for you to believe, but you know I am very truthful. I—I wrote the book they are talking about so much now. You know what I mean?"

"Not the—?"

"Yes, *The Poor Lady,*—the anonymous novel which people are talking so much about and which sold better than any other book last week. I wrote it. I really did, Margaret."

"You wrote it!"

Annie continued almost wildly. "Yes, I did, I did!" she cried, "and you are the only soul that knows except the publishers. They said they were much struck with the book but advised anonymous publication, my name was so utterly unknown."

"You wrote *The Poor Lady?*" said Margaret. Her eyes glittered, and her lips tightened. Envy possessed her, but Annie Eustace did not recognise envy when she saw it.

Annie went on in her sweet ringing voice, almost producing the effect of a song. She was so happy, and so pleased to think that she was making her friend happy.

"Yes," she said, "I wrote it. I wrote *The Poor Lady.*"

"If," said Margaret, "you speak quite so loud, you will be heard by others."

Annie lowered her voice immediately with a startled look. "Oh," she whispered. "I would not have anybody hear me for anything."

"How did you manage?" asked Margaret.

Annie laughed happily. "I fear I have been

a little deceitful," she said, "but I am sure they will forgive me when they know. I keep a journal; I have always kept one since I was a child. Aunt Harriet wished me to do so. And the journal was very stupid. So little unusual happens here in Fairbridge, and I have always been rather loath to write very much about my innermost feelings or very much about my friends in my journal because of course one can never tell what will happen. It has never seemed to me quite delicate—to keep a very full journal, and so there was in reality very little to write." Annie burst into a peal of laughter. "It just goes this way, the journal," she said. "To-day is pleasant and warm. This morning I helped Hannah preserve cherries. In the afternoon I went over to Margaret's and sat with her on the verandah, embroidered two daisies and three leaves with stems on my centre piece, came home, had supper, sat in the twilight with Grandmother, Aunt Harriet and Aunt Susan. Went upstairs, put on my wrapper and read until it was time to go to bed. Went to bed. Now that took very little time and was not interesting and so, after I went up-

stairs, I wrote my entry in the journal in about five minutes and then I wrote *The Poor Lady.* Of course, when I began it, I was not at all sure that it would amount to anything. I was not sure that any publisher would look at it. Sometimes I felt as if I were doing a very foolish thing: spending time and perhaps deceiving Grandmother and my aunts very wickedly, though I was quite certain that if the book should by any chance succeed, they would not think it wrong.

"Grandmother is very fond of books and so is Aunt Harriet, and I have often heard them say they wished I had been a boy in order that I might do something for the Eustace name. You know there have been so many distinguished professional men in the Eustace family and they of course did not for one minute think a girl like me could do anything and I did not really think so myself. Sometimes I wonder how I had the courage to keep on writing when I was so uncertain but it was exactly as if somebody were driving me. When I had the book finished, I was so afraid it ought to be typewritten, but I could not manage that. At least

I thought I could not, but after awhile I did, and in a way that nobody suspected, Aunt Harriet sent me to New York. You know I am not often allowed to go alone but it was when Grandmother had the grippe and Aunt Susan the rheumatism and Aunt Harriet had a number of errands and so I went on the Twenty-third Street ferry, and did not go far from Twenty-third Street and I took my book in my handbag and carried it into Larkins and White's and I saw Mr. Larkins in his office and he was very kind and polite, although I think now he was laughing a little to himself at the idea of my writing a book, but he said to leave the MSS. and he would let me hear. And I left it and, oh, Margaret, I heard within a week, and he said such lovely things about it. You know I always go to the post-office, so there was no chance of anybody's finding it out that way. And then the proof began to come and I was at my wits' end to conceal that, but I did. And then the book was published, and, Margaret, you know the rest. Nobody dreams who wrote it, and I have had a statement and oh, my dear, next November I am to have a check." (Annie

leaned over and whispered in Margaret's ear.)
"Only think," she said with a burst of rapture.

Margaret was quite pale. She sat looking straight before her with a strange expression. She was tasting in the very depths of her soul a bitterness which was more biting than any bitter herb which ever grew on earth. It was a bitterness, which, thank God, is unknown to many; the bitterness of the envy of an incapable, but self-seeking nature, of one with the burning ambition of genius but destitute of the divine fire. To such come unholy torture, which is unspeakable at the knowledge of another's success. Margaret Edes was inwardly writhing. To think that Annie Eustace, little Annie Eustace, who had worshipped at her own shrine, whom she had regarded with a lazy, scarcely concealed contempt, for her incredible lack of wordly knowledge, her provincialism, her ill-fitting attire, should have achieved a triumph which she herself could never achieve. A cold hatred of the girl swept over the woman. She forced her lips into a smile, but her eyes were cruel.

"How very interesting, my dear," she said.

Poor Annie started. She was acute, for all her innocent trust in another's goodness, and the tone of her friend's voice, the look in her eyes chilled her. And yet she did not know what they signified. She went on begging for sympathy and rejoicing with her joy as a child might beg for a sweet. "Isn't it perfectly lovely, Margaret dear?" she said.

"It is most interesting, my dear child," replied Margaret.

Annie went on eagerly with the details of her triumph, the book sales which increased every week, the revises, the letters from her publishers, and Margaret listened smiling in spite of her torture, but she never said more than "How interesting."

At last Annie went home and could not help feeling disappointed, although she could not fathom the significance of Margaret's reception of her astonishing news. Annie only worried because she feared lest her happiness had not cheered her friend as much as she had anticipated.

"Poor Margaret, she must feel so very bad that nothing can reconcile her to such a be-

trayal of her hospitality," she reflected as she flitted across the street. There was nobody in evidence at her house at window or on the wide verandah. Annie looked at her watch tucked in her girdle, hung around her neck by a thin gold chain which had belonged to her mother. It yet wanted a full hour of supper time. She had time to call on Alice Mendon and go to the post-office. Alice lived on the way to the post-office, in a beautiful old colonial house. Annie ran along the shady sidewalk and soon had a glimpse of Alice's pink draperies on her great front porch. Annie ran down the deep front yard between the tall box bushes, beyond which bloomed in a riot of colour and perfume roses and lilies and spraying heliotrope and pinks and the rest of their floral tribe all returned to their dance of summer. Alice's imposing colonial porch was guarded on either side of the superb circling steps by a stone lion from over seas. On the porch was a little table and several chairs. Alice sat in one reading. She was radiant in her pink muslin. Alice seldom wore white. She was quite sensible as to the best combinations of herself with colours al-

though she had, properly speaking, no vanity. She arranged herself to the best advantage as she arranged a flower in a vase. On the heavily carved mahogany table beside her was a blue and white India bowl filled with white roses and heliotrope and lemon verbena. Annie inhaled the bouquet of perfume happily as she came up the steps with Alice smiling a welcome at her. Annie had worshipped more fervently at Margaret Edes' shrine than at Alice's and yet she had a feeling of fuller confidence in Alice. She was about to tell Alice about her book, not because Alice needed the comfort of her joy but because she herself, although unknowingly, needed Alice's ready sympathy of which she had no doubt. Her interview with Margaret had left the child hurt and bewildered and now she came to Alice. Alice did not rise and kiss her. Alice seldom kissed anybody but she radiated kindly welcome.

"Sit down, little Annie," she said, "I am glad you have come. My aunt and cousin have gone to New York and I have been alone all day. We would have tea and cake but *I* know the hour of your Medes and Persians'

supper approaches instead of my later dinner."

"Yes," said Annie, sitting down, "and if I were to take tea and cake now, Alice, I could eat nothing and grandmother and my aunts are very particular about my clearing my plate."

Alice laughed, but she looked rather solicitously at the girl. "I know," she said, then she hesitated. She pitied little Annie Eustace and considered her rather a victim of loving but mistaken tyranny. "I wish," she said, "that you would stay and dine with me to-night."

Annie fairly gasped. "They expect me at home," she replied.

"I know, and I suppose if I were to send over and tell them you would dine with me, it would not answer."

Annie looked frightened. "I fear not, Alice. You see they would have had no time to think it over and decide."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"I have time to make you a little call and stop at the post-office for the last mail and get home just in time for supper."

"Oh, well, you must come and dine with me

a week from to-day, and I will have a little dinner-party," said Alice. "I will invite some nice people. We will have Mr. von Rosen for one."

Annie suddenly flushed crimson. It occurred to her that Mr. von Rosen might walk home with her as he had done from Margaret's, and a longing and terror at once possessed her.

Alice wondered at the blush.

"I was so sorry for poor Margaret last night," Annie said with an abrupt change of subject.

"Yes," said Alice.

"That poor Western girl, talented as she is, must have been oddly brought up to be so very rude to her hostess," said Annie.

"I dare say Western girls are brought up differently," said Alice.

Annie was so intent with what she had to tell Alice that she did not realise the extreme evasiveness of the other's manner.

"Alice," she said.

"Well, little Annie Eustace?"

Annie began, blushed, then hesitated.

"I am going to tell you something. I have

told Margaret. I have just told her this afternoon. I thought it might please her and comfort her after that terrible scene at her dinner last night, but nobody else knows except the publishers."

"What is it?" asked Alice, regarding Annie with a little smile.

"Nothing, only I wrote *The Poor Lady,*" said Annie.

"My dear Annie, I knew it all the time," said Alice.

Annie stared at her. "How?"

"Well, you did not know it, but you did repeat in that book verbatim, ad literatim, a sentence, a very striking one, which occurred in one of your papers which you wrote for the Zenith Club. I noticed that sentence at the time. It was this: 'A rose has enough beauty and fragrance to enable it to give very freely and yet itself remain a rose. It is the case with many endowed natures but that is a fact which is not always understood.' My dear Annie, I knew that you wrote the book, for that identical sentence occurs in *The Poor Lady* on page one hundred forty-two. You see I

have fully considered the matter to remember the exact page. I knew the minute I read that sentence that my little Annie Eustace had written that successful anonymous book, and I was the more certain because I had always had my own opinion as to little Annie's literary ability based upon those same Zenith Club papers. You will remember that I have often told you that you should not waste your time writing club papers when you could do work like that."

Annie looked alarmed. "Oh, Alice," she said, "do you think anybody else has remembered that sentence?"

"My dear child, I am quite sure that not a blessed woman in that club has remembered that sentence," said Alice.

"I had entirely forgotten."

"Of course, you had."

"It would be very unfortunate if it were remembered, because the publishers are so anxious that my name should not be known. You see, nobody ever heard of me and my name would hurt the sales and the poor publishers have worked so hard over the advertising, it would be dreadful to have the sales fall off.

You really don't think anybody does remember?"

"My dear," said Alice with her entirely good-natured, even amused and tolerant air of cynicism, "the women of the Zenith Club remember their own papers. You need not have the slightest fear. But Annie, you wonderful little girl, I am so glad you have come to me with this. I have been waiting for you to tell me, for I was impatient to tell you how delighted I am. You blessed child, I never was more glad at anything in my whole life. I am as proud as proud can be. I feel as if I had written that book myself, and better than written it myself. I have had none of the bother of the work and my friend had it and my friend has the fame and the glory and she goes around among us with her little halo hidden out of sight of everybody, except myself."

"Margaret knows."

Alice stiffened a little. "That is recent," she said, "and I have known all the time."

"Margaret could not have remembered that sentence, I am sure," Annie said thoughtfully. "Poor Margaret, she was so upset by

what happened last night that I am afraid the news did not cheer her up as much as I thought it would."

"Well, you dear little soul," said Alice, "I am simply revelling in happiness and pride because of it, you may be sure of that."

"But you have not had such an awful blow as poor Margaret had," said Annie. Then she brightened. "Oh Alice," she cried, "I wanted somebody who loved me to be glad."

"You have not told your grandmother and aunts yet?"

"I have not dared," replied Annie in a shamed fashion. "I know I deceived them and I think perhaps grandmother might find it hard not to tell. She is so old you know, and she does tell a great deal without meaning and Aunt Susan likes to tell news. I have not dared, Alice. The publishers have been so very insistent that nobody should know, but I had to tell you and Margaret."

"It made no difference anyway about me," said Alice, "since I already knew."

"Margaret can be trusted too, I am sure," Annie said quickly.

"Of course."

Annie looked at her watch. "I must go," she said, "or I shall be late. Isn't it really wonderful that I should write a successful book, Alice?"

"You are rather wonderful, my dear," said Alice. Then she rose and put her arms around the slender white-clad figure and held her close, and gave her one of her infrequent kisses. "You precious little thing," she said, "the book is wonderful, but my Annie is more wonderful because she can be told so and never get the fact into her head. Here is your work, dear."

An expression of dismay came over Annie's face. "Oh, dear," she said, "I have only embroidered half a daisy and what will Aunt Harriet say?"

"You have embroidered a whole garden as nobody else can, if people only knew it," said Alice.

"But Alice," said Annie ruefully, "my embroidery is really awful and I don't like to do it and the linen is so grimy that I am ashamed. Oh, dear, I shall have to face Aunt Harriet with that half daisy!"

Alice laughed. "She can't kill you."

"No, but I don't like to have her so disappointed."

Alice kissed Annie again before she went, and watched the slight figure flitting down between the box-rows, with a little frown of perplexity. She wished that Annie had not told Margaret Edes about the book and yet she did not know why she wished so. She was very far from expecting the results. Alice was too noble herself to entertain suspicions of the ignobility of others. Certainty she was obliged to confront, as she had confronted the affair of the night before. It was, of course, the certainty that Margaret had been guilty of a disgraceful and treacherous deed which made her uneasy in a vague fashion now and yet she did not for one second dream of what was to occur at the next meeting of the Zenith Club.

That was at Mrs. Sturtevant's and was the great affair of the year. It was called, to distinguish it from the others, "The Annual Meeting," and upon that occasion the husbands and men friends of the members were invited and the function was in the evening.

Margaret had wished to have the club at her own house, before the affair of Martha Wallingford, but the annual occasions were regulated by the letters of the alphabet and it was incontrovertibly the turn of the letter S and Mrs. Sturtevant's right could not be questioned. During the time which elapsed before this meeting, Margaret Edes was more actively unhappy than she had ever been in her life and all her strong will could not keep the traces of that unhappiness from her face. Lines appeared. Her eyes looked large in dark hollows. Wilbur grew anxious about her.

"You must go somewhere for a change," he said, "and I will get my cousin Marion to come here and keep house and look out for the children. You must not be bothered even with them. You need a complete rest and change."

But Margaret met his anxiety with irritation. She felt as if some fatal fascination confined her in Fairbridge and especially did she feel that she must be present at the annual meeting. Margaret never for one minute formulated to herself why she had this fierce desire. She knew in a horrible way at the back

of her brain, but she kept the knowledge covered as with a veil even from herself.

She had a beautiful new gown made for the occasion. Since she had lost so much colour, she was doubtful of the wisdom of wearing her favourite white and gold, or black. She had a crepe of a peculiar shade of blue which suited her and she herself worked assiduously embroidering it in a darker shade which brought out the colour of her eyes. She looked quite herself when the evening came and Wilbur's face brightened as he looked at her in her trailing blue with a little diamond crescent fastening a tiny blue feather in her golden fluff of hair.

"You certainly do look better," he said happily.

"I am well, you old goose," said Margaret, fastening her long blue gloves. "You have simply been fussing over nothing as I told you."

"Well, I hope I have. You do look stunning to-night," said Wilbur, gazing at her with a pride so intense that it was almost piteous in its self-abnegation.

"Is that your stunt there on the table?" he inquired, pointing to a long envelope.

Margaret laughed carefully, dimpling her cheeks. "Yes," she said, and Wilbur took the envelope and put it into his pocket. "I will carry it for you," he said. "By the way, what is your stunt, honey? Did you write something?"

"Wait, until you hear," replied Margaret, and she laughed carefully again. She gathered up the train of her blue gown and turned upon him, her blue eyes glowing with a strange fire, feverish roses on her cheeks. "You are not to be surprised at anything to-night," she said and laughed again.

She still had a laughing expression when they were seated in Mrs. Sturtevant's flower-scented drawing-room, a handsome room, thanks to the decorator, who was young and enthusiastic. Margaret had duly considered the color scheme in her choice of a gown. The furniture was upholstered with a wisteria pattern, except a few chairs which were cane-seated, with silvered wood. Margaret had gone directly to one of these chairs. She was not sure of her

gown being exactly the right shade of blue to harmonise with the wisteria at close quarters. The chair was tall and slender. Margaret's feet did not touch the floor, but the long blue trail of her gown concealed that, and she contrived to sit as if they did. She gave the impression of a tall creature of extreme grace as she sat propping her back against her silvered chair. Wilbur gazed at her with adoration. He had almost forgotten the affair of Martha Wallingford. He had excused his Margaret because she was a woman and he was profoundly ignorant of women's strange ambitions. Now, he regarded her with unqualified admiration. He looked from her to the other women and back again and was entirely convinced that she outshone them all as a sun a star. He looked at the envelope in her blue lap and was sure that she had written something which was infinitely superior to the work of any other woman there. Down in the depths of his masculine soul, Wilbur Edes had a sense of amused toleration when women's clubs were concerned, but he always took his Margaret seriously, and the Zenith

Club on that account was that night an important and grave organisation. He wished very much to smoke and he was wedged into an uncomfortable corner with a young girl who insisted upon talking to him and was all the time nervously rearranging her hair, but he had a good view of his Margaret in her wonderful blue gown, in her silver chair, and he was consoled.

"Have you read *The Poor Lady?*" asked spasmodically the girl, and drove in a slipping hair-pin at the same time.

"I never read novels," replied Wilbur absently, "haven't much time you know."

"Oh, I suppose not, but that is such a wonderful book and only think, nobody has the least idea who wrote it, and it does make it so interesting. I thought myself it was written by Wilbur Jack until I came to a sentence which I could quite understand and that put him out of the question. Of course, Wilbur Jack is such a great genius that no young girl like myself pretends to understand him, but that is why I worship him. I tell Mamma I think he is the ideal writer for young girls, so elevating.

And then I thought *The Poor Lady* might have been written by Mrs. Eudora Peasely because she is always so lucid and I came to a sentence which I could not understand at all. Oh, dear, I have thought of all the living writers as writing that book and have had to give it up, and of course the dead ones are out of the question."

"Of course," said Wilbur gravely, and then his Margaret stood up and took some printed matter from an envelope and instantly the situation became strangely tense. Men and women turned eager faces; they could not have told why eager, but they were all conscious of something unusual in the atmosphere and every expression upon those expectant faces suddenly changed into one which made them as a listening unit. Then Margaret began.

CHAPTER VII

Wilbur Edes thought he had never seen his wife look as beautiful as she did standing there before them all with those fluttering leaves of paper in her hand. A breeze came in at an opposite window and Margaret's blue feather tossed in it; her yellow hair crisped and fluffed and the paper fluttered. Margaret stood for an appreciable second surveying them all with a most singular expression. It was compounded of honeyed sweetness, of triumph, and something else more subtle, the expression of a warrior entering battle and ready for death, yet terrible with defiance and the purpose of victory, and death for his foe.

Then Margaret spoke and her thin silvery voice penetrated to every ear in the room.

"Members of the Zenith Club and friends," said Margaret, "I take the opportunity offered me to-night to disclose a secret which is a source of much joy to myself, and which I am

sure will be a source of joy to you also. I trust that since you are my friends and neighbours and associates in club work, you will acquit me of the charge of egotism and credit me with my whole motive, which is, I think, not an unworthy one coming to you in joy, as I would come in sorrow for your sympathy and understanding. I am about to read an extract from a book whose success has given me the most unqualified surprise and delight, knowing as I do that a reading by an author from her own work always increases the interest even though she may not be an able expositor by word of mouth of what she has written."

Then Margaret read. She had chosen a short chapter which was in itself almost a complete little story. She read exceedingly well and without faltering. People listened with ever-growing amazement. Then Mrs. Jack Evarts whispered so audibly to a man at her side that she broke in upon Margaret's clear recitative. "Goodness, she's reading from that book that is selling so,—*The Poor Lady*—I remember every word of that chapter."

Then while Margaret continued her reading imperturbably, the chorus of whispers increased. "That is from *The Poor Lady,* yes, it is. Did she write it? Why, of course, she did. She just said so. Isn't it wonderful that she has done such a thing?"

Wilbur Edes sat with his eyes riveted upon his wife's face, his own gone quite pale, but upon it an expression of surprise and joy so intense that he looked almost foolish from such a revelation of his inner self.

The young girl beside him drove hair pins frantically into her hair. She twisted up a lock which had strayed and fastened it. She looked alternately at Wilbur and Margaret.

"Goodness gracious," said she, and did not trouble to whisper. "That is the next to the last chapter of *The Poor Lady.* And to think that your wife wrote it! Goodness gracious, and here she has been living right here in Fairbridge all the time and folks have been seeing her and talking to her and never knew! Did you know, Mr. Edes?"

The young girl fixed her sharp pretty eyes upon Wilbur. "Never dreamed of it," he

blurted out, "just as much surprised as any of you."

"I don't believe I could have kept such a wonderful thing as that from my own husband," said the girl, who was unmarried, and had no lover. But Wilbur did not hear. All he heard was his beloved Margaret, who had secretly achieved fame for herself, reading on and on. He had not the slightest idea what she was reading. He had no interest whatever in that. All he cared for was the amazing fact that his wife, his wonderful, beautiful Margaret, had so covered herself with glory and honour. He had a slightly hurt feeling because she had not told him until this public revelation. He felt that his own private joy and pride as her husband should have been perhaps sacred and respected by her and yet possibly she was right. This public glory might have seemed to her the one which would the most appeal to him.

He had, as he had said, not read the book, but he recalled with a sort of rapturous tenderness for Margaret how he had seen the posters all along the railroad as he commuted to the city,

and along the elevated road. His face gazing at Margaret was as beautiful in its perfectly unselfish pride and affection, as a mother's. To think that his darling had done such a thing! He longed to be at home alone with her and say to her what he could not say before all these people. He thought of a very good reason why she had chosen this occasion to proclaim her authorship of the famous anonymous novel. She had been so humiliated, poor child, by the insufferable rudeness of that Western girl that she naturally wished to make good. And how modest and unselfish she had been to make the attempt to exalt another author when she herself was so much greater. Wilbur fully exonerated Margaret for what she did in the case of Martha Wallingford in the light of this revelation. His modest, generous, noble wife had honestly endeavoured to do the girl a favour, to assist her in spite of herself and she had received nothing save rudeness, ingratitude, and humiliation in return. Now, she was asserting herself. She was showing all Fairbridge that she was the one upon whom honour should be showered. She was showing him

and rightfully. He remembered with compunction his severity toward her on account of the Martha Wallingford affair, his beautiful, gifted Margaret! Why, even then she might have electrified that woman's club by making the revelation which she had won to-night and reading this same selection from her own book. He had not read Martha Wallingford's *Hearts Astray.* He thought that the title was enough for him. He knew that it must be one of the womanish, hysterical, sentimental type of things which he despised. But Margaret had been so modest that she had held back from the turning on the search-light of her own greater glory. She had made the effort which had resulted so disastrously to obtain a lesser one, and he had condemned her. He knew that women always used circuitous ways toward their results, just as men used sledge-hammer ones. Why should a man criticise a woman's method any more than a woman criticise a man's? Wilbur, blushing like a girl with pride and delight, listened to his wife and fairly lashed himself. He was wholly unworthy of such a woman, he knew.

When the reading was over and people crowded around Margaret and congratulated her, he stood aloof. He felt that he could not speak of this stupendous thing with her until they were alone. Then Doctor Sturtevant's great bulk pressed against him and his sonorous voice said in his ear, "By Jove, old man, your wife has drawn a lucky number. Congratulations." Wilbur gulped as he thanked him. Then Sturtevant went on talking about a matter which was rather dear to Wilbur's own ambition and which he knew had been tentatively discussed: the advisability of his running for State Senator in the autumn. Wilbur knew it would be a good thing for him professionally, and at the bottom of his heart he knew that his wife's success had been the last push toward his own. Other men came in and began talking, leading from his wife's success toward his own, until Wilbur realised himself as dazzled.

He did not notice what Von Rosen noticed, because he had kept his attention upon the girl, that Annie Eustace had turned deadly pale when Margaret had begun her reading and that

Alice Mendon who was seated beside her had slipped an arm around her and quietly and unobtrusively led her out of the room. Von Rosen thought that Miss Eustace must have turned faint because of the heat, and was conscious of a distinct anxiety and disappointment. He had, without directly acknowledging it to himself, counted upon walking home with Annie Eustace, but yet he hoped that she might return, that she had not left the home. When the refreshments were served, he looked for her, but Annie was long since at Alice Mendon's house in her room. Alice had hurried her there in her carriage.

"Come home with me, dear," she had whispered, "and we can have a talk together. Your people won't expect you yet."

Therefore, while Karl von Rosen, who had gone to this annual meeting of the Zenith Club for the sole purpose of walking home with Annie, waited, the girl sat in a sort of dumb and speechless state in Alice Mendon's room. It seemed to her like a bad dream. Alice herself stormed. She had a high temper, but seldom gave way to it. Now she did.

There was something about this which roused her utmost powers of indignation.

"It is simply an outrage," declared Alice, marching up and down the large room, her rich white gown trailing behind her, her chin high. "I did not think her capable of it. It is the worst form of thievery in the world, stealing the work of another's brain. It is inconceivable that Margaret Edes could have done such a preposterous thing. I never liked her. I don't care if I do admit it, but I never thought she was capable of such an utterly ignoble deed. It was all that I could do to master myself, not to stand up before them all and denounce her. Well, her time will come."

"Alice," said a ghastly little voice from the stricken figure on the couch, "are you sure? Am I sure? Was that from my book?"

"Of course it was from your book. Why, you know it was from your book, Annie Eustace," cried Alice and her voice sounded high with anger toward poor Annie herself.

"I hoped that we might be mistaken after all," said the voice, which had a bewildered quality. Annie Eustace had a nature which

could not readily grasp some of the evil of humanity. She was in reality dazed before this. She was ready to believe an untruth rather than the incredible truth. But Alice Mendon was merciless. She resolved that Annie should know once for all.

"We are neither of us mistaken," she said. "Margaret Edes read a chapter from your book, *The Poor Lady,* and without stating in so many words that she was the author, she did what was worse. She made everybody think so. Annie, she is bad, bad, bad. Call the spade a spade and face it. See how black it is. Margaret Edes has stolen from you your best treasure."

"I don't care for that so much," said Annie Eustace, "but—I loved her, Alice."

"Then," said Alice, "she has stolen more than your book. She has stolen the light by which you wrote it. It is something hideous, hideous."

Annie gave a queer little dry sob. "Margaret could not have done it," she moaned.

Alice crossed swiftly to her and knelt beside her. "Darling," she said, "you must face it.

It is better. I do not say so because I do not personally like Margaret Edes, but you must have courage and face it."

"I have not courage enough," said Annie and she felt that she had not, for it was one of the awful tasks of the world which was before her: The viewing the mutilated face of love itself.

"You must," said Alice. She put an arm around the slight figure and drew the fair head to her broad bosom, her maternal bosom, which served her friends in good stead, since it did not pillow the heads of children. Friends in distress are as children to the women of her type.

"Darling," she said in her stately voice from which the anger had quite gone. "Darling, you must face it. Margaret did read that chapter from your book and she told, or as good as told everybody that she had written it."

Then Annie sobbed outright and the tears came.

"Oh," she cried, "Oh, Alice, how she must want success to do anything like that, poor, poor Margaret! Oh, Alice!"

"How she must love herself," said Alice firmly. "Annie, you must face it. Margaret is a self-lover; her whole heart turns in love toward her own self, instead of toward those whom she should love and who love her. Annie, Margaret is bad, bad, with a strange degenerate badness. She dates back to the sins of the First Garden. You must turn your back upon her. You must not love her any more."

"No, I must not love her any more," agreed Annie, "and that is the pity of it. I must not love her, Alice, but I must pity her until I die. Poor Margaret!"

"Poor Annie," said Alice. "You worked so hard over that book, dear, and you were so pleased. Annie, what shall you do about it?"

Annie raised her head from Alice's bosom and sat up straight, with a look of terror.

"Alice," she cried, "I must go to-morrow and see my publishers. I must go down on my knees to them if necessary."

"Do you mean," asked Alice slowly, "never to tell?"

"Oh, never, never, never!" cried Annie.

"I doubt," said Alice, "if you can keep such a matter secret. I doubt if your publishers will consent."

"They must. I will never have it known! Poor Margaret!"

"I don't pity her at all," said Alice. "I do pity her husband who worships her, and there is talk of his running for State Senator and this would ruin him. And I am sorry for the children."

"Nobody shall ever know," said Annie.

"But how can you manage with the publishers?"

"I don't know. I will."

"And you will have written that really wonderful book and never have the credit for it. You will live here and see Margaret Edes praised for what you have done."

"Poor Margaret," said Annie. "I must go now. I know I can trust you never to speak."

"Of course, but I do not think it right."

"I don't care whether it is right or not," said Annie. "It must never be known."

"You are better than I am," said Alice as

she rang the bell, which was presently answered. "Peter has gone home for the night, Marie said," Alice told Annie, "but Marie and I will walk home with you."

"Alice, it is only a step."

"I know, but it is late."

"It is not much after ten, and—I would rather go alone, if you don't mind, Alice. I want to get settled a little before Aunt Harriet sees me. I can do it better alone."

Alice laughed. "Well," she said, "Marie and I will stand on the front porch until you are out of sight from there and then we will go to the front gate. We can see nearly to your house and we can hear if you call."

It was a beautiful night. The moon was high in a sky which was perceptibly blue. In the west was still a faint glow, which was like a memory of a cowslip sunset. The street and the white house-front were plumy with soft tree shadows wavering in a gentle wind. Annie was glad when she was alone in the night. She needed a moment for solitariness and readjustment since one of the strongest readjustments on earth faced her—the reali-

sation that what she had loved was not. She did not walk rapidly but lingered along the road. She was thankful that neither of her aunts had been to the annual meeting. She would not need to account for her time so closely. Suddenly she heard a voice, quite a loud voice, a man's, with a music of gladness in it. Annie knew instinctively whose it was, and she stepped quickly upon a lawn and stood behind a clump of trees. A man and woman passed her—Margaret Edes and her husband—and Wilbur was saying in his glad, loving voice, "To think you should have done such a thing, Margaret, my dear, you will never know how proud I am of you."

Annie heard Margaret's voice in a whisper hushing Wilbur. "You speak so loud, dear," said Margaret, "everybody will hear you."

"I don't care if they do," said Wilbur. "I should like to proclaim it from the housetops." Then they passed and the rose scent of Margaret's garments was in Annie's face. She was glad that Margaret had hushed her husband. She argued that it proved some little sense of shame, but oh, when all alone with

her own husband, she had made no disclaimer. Annie came out from her hiding and went on. The Edes ahead of her melted into the shadows but she could still hear Wilbur's glad voice. The gladness in it made her pity Margaret more. She thought how horrible it must be to deceive love like that, to hear that joyful tone, and know it all undeserved. Then suddenly she heard footsteps behind and walked to one side to allow whoever it was to pass, but a man's voice said: "Good evening, Miss Eustace," and Von Rosen had joined her. He had in truth been waiting like any village beau near Alice Mendon's house for the chance of her emerging alone.

Annie felt annoyed, and yet her heart beat strangely.

"Good evening, Mr. von Rosen," she said and still lingered as if to allow him to pass, but he slowed his own pace and sauntered by her side.

"A fine evening," he remarked tritely.

"Very," agreed Annie.

"I saw you at the evening club," said Von Rosen presently.

"Yes," said Annie, "I was there."

"You left early."

"Yes, I left quite early with Alice. I have been with her since."

Annie wondered if Mr. von Rosen suspected anything but his next words convinced her that he did not.

"I suppose that you were as much surprised as the rest of us, although you are her intimate friend, at Mrs. Edes' announcement concerning the authorship of that successful novel," said he.

"Yes," said Annie faintly.

"Of course you had no idea that she had written it?"

"No."

"Have you read it?"

"Yes."

"What do you think of it? I almost never read novels but I suppose I must tackle that one. Did you like it?"

"Quite well," said Annie.

"Tell me what is it all about?"

Annie could endure no more. "It will spoil the book for you if I tell you, Mr. von Rosen,"

said she, and her voice was at once firm and piteous. She could not tell the story of her own book to him. She would be as deceitful as poor Margaret, for all the time he would think she was talking of Margaret's work and not of her own.

Von Rosen laughed. After all he cared very little indeed about the book. He had what he cared for: a walk home with this very sweet and very natural girl, who did not seem to care whether he walked home with her or not.

"I dare say you are right," he said, "but I doubt if your telling me about it would spoil the book for me, because it is more than probable that I shall never read it after all. I may if it comes in my way because I was somewhat surprised. I had never thought of Mrs. Edes as that sort of person. However, so many novels are written nowadays, and some mighty queer ones are successful that I presume I should not be surprised. Anybody in Fairbridge might be the author of a successful novel. You might, Miss Eustace, for all I know."

Annie said nothing.

"Perhaps you are," said Von Rosen. He had not the least idea of the thinness of the ice. Annie trembled. Her truthfulness was as her life. She hated even evasions. Luckily Von Rosen was so far from suspicion that he did not wait for an answer.

"Mrs. Edes reads well," he said.

"Very well indeed," returned Annie eagerly.

"I suppose an author can read more understandingly from her own work," said Von Rosen. "Don't you think so, Miss Eustace?"

"I think she might," said Annie.

"I don't know but I shall read that book after all," said Von Rosen. "I rather liked that extract she gave us. It struck me as out of the common run of women's books. I beg your pardon, Miss Eustace. If you were a writer yourself I could not speak so, but you are not, and you must know as well as I do, that many of the books written by women are simply sloughs of oversweetened sentiment, and of entirely innocent immorality. But that chapter did not sound as if it could belong to such a book. It sounded altogether too logical for the average woman writer. I think I will read

it. Then after I have read it, you will not refuse to discuss it with me, will you?"

"I do not think so," replied Annie tremulously. Would he never talk of anything except that book? To her relief he did, to her relief and scarcely acknowledged delight.

"Are you interested in curios, things from Egyptian tombs, for instance?" he inquired with brutal masculine disregard of sequence.

Annie was bewildered, but she managed to reply that she thought she might be. She had heard of Von Rosen's very interesting collection.

"I happened to meet your aunt, Miss Harriet, this afternoon," said Von Rosen, "and I inquired if she were by any chance interested and she said she was."

"Yes," said Annie. She had never before dreamed that her Aunt Harriet was in the least interested in Egyptian tombs.

"I ventured to ask if she and her sister, Miss Susan, and you also, if you cared to see it, would come some afternoon and look at my collection," said Von Rosen.

Nobody could have dreamed from his casual

tone how carefully he had planned it all out: the visit of Annie and her aunts, the delicate little tea served in the study, the possible little stroll with Annie in his garden. Von Rosen knew that one of the aunts, Miss Harriet, was afflicted with rose cold, and therefore, would probably not accept his invitation to view his rose-garden, and he also knew that it was improbable that both sisters would leave their aged mother. It was, of course, a toss-up as to whether Miss Harriet or Miss Susan would come. It was also a toss-up as to whether or not they might both come, and leave little Annie as companion for the old lady. In fact, he had to admit to himself that the latter contingency was the more probable. He was well accustomed to being appropriated by elder ladies, with the evident understanding that he preferred them. He would simply have to make the best of it and show his collection as gracefully as possible and leave out the rose-garden and the delicious little tête-à-tête with this young rose of a girl and think of something else. For Karl von Rosen in these days was accustoming himself to a strange visage in his

own mental looking-glass. He had not altered his attitude toward women but toward one woman, and that one was now sauntering beside him in the summer moonlight, her fluffy white garments now and then blowing across his sober garb. He was conscious of holding himself in a very tight rein. He wondered how long men were usually about their love-making. He wished to make love that very instant, but he feared lest the girl might be lost by such impetuosity. In all likelihood, the thought of love in connection with himself had never entered her mind. Why should it? Karl in love was very modest and saw himself as a very insignificant figure. Probably this flower-like young creature had never thought of love at all. She had lived her sweet simple village life. She had obeyed her grandmother and her aunts, done her household tasks and embroidered. He remembered the grimy bit of linen which he had picked up and he could not see the very slightest connection between that sort of thing and love and romance. Of course, she had read a few love stories and the reasoning by analogy develops in all minds. She might have built a

few timid air castles for herself upon the foundations of the love stories in fiction, and this brought him around to the fatal subject again almost inevitably.

"Do you know, Miss Eustace," he said, "that I am wishing a very queer thing about you?"

"What, Mr. von Rosen?"

"I am wishing, you know that I would not esteem you more highly, it is not that, but I am wishing that you also had written a book, a really good sort of love story, novel, you know."

Annie gasped.

"I don't mean because Mrs. Edes wrote *The Poor Lady.* It is not that. I am quite sure that you could have written a book every whit as good as hers but what I do mean is—I feel that a woman writer if she writes the best sort of book must obtain a certain insight concerning human nature which requires a long time for most women." Von Rosen was rather mixed, but Annie did not grasp it. She was very glad that they were nearing her own home. She could not endure much more.

"Is *The Poor Lady* a love story?" inquired Von Rosen.

"There is a little love in it," replied Annie faintly.

"I shall certainly read it," said Von Rosen. He shook hands with Annie at her gate and wanted to kiss her. She looked up in his face like an adorably timid, trustful little child and it seemed almost his duty to kiss her, but he did not. He said good-night and again mentioned his collection of curios.

"I hope you will feel inclined to come and see them," he said, "with—your aunts."

"Thank you," replied Annie, "I shall be very glad to come, if both Aunt Harriet and Aunt Susan do not. That would of course oblige me to stay with grandmother."

"Of course," assented Von Rosen, but he said inwardly, "Hang Grandmother."

In his inmost self, Von Rosen was not a model clergyman. He, however, had no reason whatever to hang grandmother, but quite the reverse, although he did not so conclude, as he considered the matter on his way home. It seemed to him that this darling of a girl was

fairly hedged in by a barbed wire fence of feminine relatives.

He passed the Edes' house on his way and saw that a number of the upper windows were still lighted. He even heard a masculine voice pitched on a high cadence of joy and triumph. He smiled a little scornfully. "He thinks his wife is the most wonderful woman in the world," he told himself, "and I daresay that a novel is simply like an over-sweetened ice-cream, with an after taste of pepper, out of sheer deviltry." Had he known it, Margaret Edes herself was tasting pepper, mustard and all the fierce condiments known, in her very soul. It was a singular thing that Margaret had been obliged to commit an ignoble deed in order to render her soul capable of tasting to the full, but she had been so constituted. As Karl von Rosen passed that night, she was sitting in her room, clad in her white silk negligee and looking adorable, and her husband was fairly on his knees before her, worshipping her, and she was suffering after a fashion hitherto wholly uncomprehended by her. Margaret had never known that she could possibly

be to blame for anything, that she could sit in judgment upon herself. Now she knew it and the knowledge brought a torture which had been unimaginable by her. She strove not to make her shrinking from her husband and his exultation—her terrified shrinking—evident.

"Oh, Margaret, you are simply wonderful beyond words," said Wilbur, gazing up into her face. "I always knew you were wonderful, of course, darling, but this! Why, Margaret, you have gained an international reputation from that one book! And the reviews have been unanimous, almost unanimous in their praise. I have not read it, dear. I am so ashamed of myself, but you know I never read novels, but I am going to read my Margaret's novel. Oh, my dear, my wonderful, wonderful dear!" Wilbur almost sobbed. "Do you know what it may do for me, too?" he said. "Do you know, Margaret, it may mean my election as Senator. One can never tell what may sway popular opinion. Once, if anybody had told me that I might be elected to office and my election might possibly be due to the fact that my wife had distinguished myself, I should have

been humbled to the dust. But I cannot be humbled by any success which may result from your success. I did not know my wonderful Margaret then." Wilbur kissed his wife's hands. He was almost ridiculous, but it was horribly tragic for Margaret.

She longed as she had never longed for anything in her life, for the power to scream, to shout in his ears the truth, but she could not. She was bound hard and fast in the bands of her own falsehood. She could not so disgrace her husband, her children. Why had she not thought of them before? She had thought only of herself and her own glory, and that glory had turned to stinging bitterness upon her soul. She was tasting the bitterest medicine which life and the whole world contains. And at the same time, it was not remorse that she felt. That would have been easier. What she endured was self-knowledge. The reflection of one's own character under unbiased cross-lights is a hideous thing for a self-lover. She was thinking, while she listened to Wilbur's rhapsodies. Finally she scarcely heard him. Then her attention

was suddenly keenly fixed. There were horrible complications about this which she had not considered. Margaret's mind had no business turn. She had not for a moment thought of the financial aspect of the whole. Wilbur was different. What he was now saying was very noble, but very disconcerting. "Of course, I know, darling, that all this means a pile of money, but one thing you must remember: it is for yourself alone. Not one penny of it will I ever touch and more than that it is not to interfere in the least with my expenditures for you, my wife, and the children. Everything of that sort goes on as before. You have the same allowance for yourself and the children as before. Whatever comes from your book is your own to do with as you choose. I do not even wish you to ask my advice about the disposal of it."

Margaret was quite pale as she looked at him. She remembered now the sum which Annie had told her she was to receive. She made no disclaimer. Her lips felt stiff. While Wilbur wished for no disclaimer, she could yet see that he was a little surprised at

receiving none, but she could not speak. She merely gazed at him in a helpless sort of fashion. The grapes which hung over her friend's garden wall were not very simple. They were much beside grapes. Wilbur returned her look pityingly.

"Poor girl," he said, kissing her hands again; "she is all tired out and I must let her go to bed. Standing on a pedestal is rather tiresome, if it is gratifying, isn't it, sweetheart?"

"Yes," said Margaret, with a weary sigh from her heart. How little the poor man knew of the awful torture of standing upon the pedestal of another, and at the same time holding before one's eyes that looking-glass with all the cross-lights of existence full upon it!

Margaret went to bed, but she could not sleep. All night long she revolved the problem of how she should settle the matter with Annie Eustace. She did not for a second fear Annie's betrayal, but there was that matter of the publishers. Would they be content to allow matters to rest?

The next morning Margaret endeavoured to

get Annie on the telephone but found that she had gone to New York. Annie's Aunt Harriet replied. She herself had sent the girl on several errands.

Margaret could only wait. She feared lest Annie might not return before Wilbur and in such a case she could not discuss matters with her before the next day. Margaret had a horrible time during the next six hours. The mail was full of letters of congratulation. A local reporter called to interview her. She sent word that she was out, but he was certain that he had seen her. The children heard the news and pestered her with inquiries about her book and wondering looks at her. Callers came in the afternoon and it was all about her book. Nobody could know how relieved she was after hearing the four-thirty train, to see little Annie Eustace coming through her gate. Annie stood before her stiffly. The day was very warm and the girl looked tired and heated.

"No, thank you," she said, "I can not sit down. I only stopped to tell you that I have arranged with the publishers. They will keep the secret. I shall have rather a hard task ar-

ranging about the checks, because I fear it will involve a little deceit and I do not like deceit."

Annie, as she spoke, looked straight at Margaret and there was something terrible in that clear look of unsoiled truth. Margaret put out a detaining hand.

"Sit down for a minute, please," she said cringingly. "I want to explain?"

"There is nothing whatever to explain," replied Annie. "I heard."

"Can you ever forgive me?"

"I do not think," said Annie, "that this is an ordinary offence about which to talk of forgiveness. I do pity you, Margaret, for I realise how dreadfully you must have wanted what did not belong to you."

Margaret winced. "Well, if it is any satisfaction to you, I am realising nothing but misery from it," she said in a low voice.

"I don't see how you can help that," replied Annie simply. Then she went away.

It proved Margaret's unflinching trust in the girl and Annie's recognition of no possibility except that trust, that no request nor promise as to secrecy had been made. Annie, after she

got home, almost forgot the whole for a time, since her Aunt Harriet, and Aunt Harriet was the sister who was subject to rose-colds, announced her determination to call at Mr. von Rosen's the next afternoon with Annie and see his famous collection.

"Of course," said she, "the invitation was meant particularly for me, since I am one of his parishioners, and I think it will be improving to you, Annie, to view antiquities."

"Yes, Aunt Harriet," said Annie. She was wondering if she would be allowed to wear her pale blue muslin and the turquoise necklace which was a relic of her grandmother's girlhood. Aunt Susan sniffed delicately.

"I will stay with Mother," she said with a virtuous air.

The old lady, stately in her black satin, with white diamonds gleaming on her veinous hands, glanced acutely at them. The next day, when her daughter Harriet insisted that the cross barred muslin was not too spoiled to wear to the inspection of curios, she declared that it was simply filthy, and that Annie must wear her blue, and that the little string of turquoise

beads was not in the least too dressy for the occasion.

It therefore happened that Annie and her Aunt Harriet set forth at three o'clock in the afternoon, Annie in blue, and her aunt in thin black grenadine with a glitter of jet and a little black bonnet with a straight tuft of green rising from a little wobble of jet, and a black-fringed parasol tilted well over her eyes. Annie's charming little face was framed in a background of white parasol. Margaret saw them pass as she sat on her verandah. She had received more congratulatory letters that day, and the thief envied the one from whom she had taken. Annie bowed to Margaret, and her Aunt Harriet said something about the heat, in a high shrill voice.

"She is a wonderful woman, to have written that successful novel," said Aunt Harriet, "and I am going to write her a congratulatory note, now you have bought that stationery at Tiffany's. I feel that such a subject demands special paper. She is a wonderful woman and her family have every reason to be proud of her."

"Yes," said Annie.

"It is rather odd, and I have often thought so," said Aunt Harriet, moving alongside with stately sweeps of black skirts, "that you have shown absolutely no literary taste. As you know, I have often written poetry, of course not for publication, and my friends have been so good as to admire it."

"Yes, Aunt Harriet," said Annie.

"I realise that you have never appreciated my poems," said Aunt Harriet tartly.

"I don't think I understand poetry very well," little Annie said with meekness.

"It does require a peculiar order of mind, and you have never seemed to me in the least poetical or imaginative," said her aunt in an appeased voice. "For instance, I could not imagine your writing a book like Mrs. Edes, and *The Poor Lady* was anonymous, and anybody might have written it as far as one knew. But I should never have imagined her for a moment as capable of doing it."

"No," said Annie.

Then they had come to the parsonage and Jane Riggs, as rigid as starched linen could

make a human being, admitted them, and presently after a little desultory conversation, the collection, which was really a carefully made one, and exceedingly good and interesting, was being displayed. Then came the charming little tea which Von Rosen had planned; then the suggestion with regard to the rose-garden and Aunt Harriet's terrified refusal, knowing as she knew the agony of sneezes and sniffs sure to follow its acceptance; and then Annie, a vision in blue, was walking among the roses with Von Rosen and both were saying things which they never could remember afterward—about things in which neither had the very slightest interest. It was only when they had reached the end of the pergola, trained over with climbers, and the two were seated on a rustic bench therein, that the conversation to be remembered began.

CHAPTER VIII

The conversation began, paradoxically, with a silence. Otherwise, it would have begun with platitudes. Since neither Von Rosen nor Annie Eustace were given usually to platitudes, the silence was unavoidable. Both instinctively dreaded with a pleasureable dread the shock of speech. In a way this was the first time the two had been alone with any chance of a seclusion protracted beyond a very few minutes. In the house was Aunt Harriet Eustace, who feared a rose, as she might have feared the plague, and, moreover, as Annie comfortably knew, had imparted the knowledge to Von Rosen as they had walked down the pergola, that she would immediately fall asleep.

"Aunt Harriet always goes to sleep in her chair after a cup of tea," Annie had said and had then blushed redly.

"Does she?" asked Von Rosen with apparent absent-mindedness but in reality, keenly. He excused himself for a moment, left Annie

standing in the pergola and hurried back to the house, where he interviewed Jane Riggs, and told her not to make any noise, as Miss Eustace in the library would probably fall asleep, as was her wont after a cup of tea. Jane Riggs assented, but she looked after him with a long, slow look. Then she nodded her head stiffly and went on washing cups and saucers quietly. She spoke only one short sentence to herself. "He's a man and it's got to be somebody. Better be her than anybody else."

When the two at the end of the pergola began talking, it was strangely enough about the affair of the Syrian girl.

"I suppose, have always supposed, that the poor young thing's husband came and stole his little son," said Von Rosen.

"You would have adopted him?" asked Annie in a shy voice.

"I think I would not have known any other course to take," replied Von Rosen.

"It was very good of you," Annie said. She cast a little glance of admiration at him.

Von Rosen laughed. "It is not goodness

which counts to one's credit when one is simply chucked into it by Providence," he returned.

Annie laughed. "To think of your speaking of Providence as 'chucking.'"

"It is rather awful," admitted Von Rosen, "but somehow I never do feel as if I need be quite as straight-laced with you."

"Mr. von Rosen, you have talked with me exactly twice, and I am at a loss as to whether I should consider that remark of yours as a compliment or not."

"I meant it for one," said Von Rosen earnestly. "I should not have used that expression. What I meant was I felt that I could be myself with you, and not weigh words or split hairs. A clergyman has to do a lot of that, you know, Miss Eustace, and sometimes (perhaps all the time) he hates it; it makes him feel like a hypocrite."

"Then it is all right," said Annie rather vaguely. She gazed up at the weave of leaves and blossoms, then down at the wavering carpet of their shadows.

"It is lovely here," she said.

The young man looked at the slender young

creature in the blue gown and smiled with utter content.

"It is very odd," he said, "but nothing except blue and that particular shade of blue would have harmonised."

"I should have said green or pink."

"They would surely have clashed. If you can't melt into nature, it is much safer to try for a discord. You are much surer to chord. That blue does chord, and I doubt if a green would not have been a sort of swear word in colour here."

"I am glad you like it," said Annie like a school girl. She felt very much like one.

"I like you," Von Rosen said abruptly.

Annie said nothing. She sat very still.

"No, I don't like you. I love you," said Von Rosen.

"How can you? You have talked with me only twice."

"That makes no difference with me. Does it with you?"

"No," said Annie, "but I am not at all sure about—"

"About what, dear?"

"About what my aunts and grandmother will say."

"Do you think they will object to me?"

"No-o."

"What is it makes you doubtful? I have a little fortune of my own. I have an income besides my salary. I can take care of you. They can trust you to me."

Annie looked at him with a quick flush of resentment. "As if I would even think of such a thing as that!"

"What then?"

"You will laugh, but grandmother is very old, although she sits up so straight, and she depends on me, and—"

"And what?"

"If I married you, I could not, of course, play pinocle with grandmother on Sunday."

"Oh, yes, you could. I most certainly should not object."

"Then that makes it hopeless."

Von Rosen looked at her in perplexity. "I am afraid I don't understand you, dear little soul."

"No, you do not. You see, grandmother is

in reality very good, almost too good to live, and thinking she is being a little wicked playing pinocle on Sunday when Aunt Harriet and Aunt Susan don't know it, sort of keeps her going. I don't just know why myself, but I am sure of it. Now the minute she was sure that you, who are the minister, did not object, she would not care a bit about pinocle and it would hurt her."

Annie looked inconceivably young. She knitted her candid brows and stared at him with round eyes of perplexity. Karl von Rosen shouted with laughter.

"Oh, well, if that is all," he said, "I object strenuously to your playing pinocle with your grandmother on Sunday. The only way you can manage will be to play hookey from church."

"I need not do that always," said Annie. "My aunts take naps Sunday afternoons, but I am sure grandmother could keep awake if she thought she could be wicked."

"Well, you can either play hookey from church, or run away Sunday afternoons, or if you prefer and she is able, I will drive your

grandmother over here and you can play pinocle in my study."

"Then I do think she will live to be a hundred," said Annie with a peal of laughter.

"Stop laughing and kiss me," said Von Rosen.

"I seldom kiss anybody."

"That is the reason."

When Annie looked up from her lover's shoulder, a pair of topaz eyes were mysteriously regarding her.

"The cat never saw me kiss anybody," said Von Rosen.

"Do you think the cat knows?" asked Annie, blushing and moving away a little.

"Who knows what any animal knows or does not know?" replied Von Rosen. "When we discover that mystery, we may have found the key to existence."

Then the cat sprang into Annie's blue lap and she stroked his yellow back and looked at Von Rosen with eyes suddenly reflective, rather coolly.

"After all, I, nor nobody else, ever heard of such a thing as this," said she. "Do you mean

that you consider this an engagement?" she asked in astonishment.

"I most certainly do."

"After we have only really seen and talked to each other twice!"

"It has been all our lives and we have just found it out," said Von Rosen. "Of course, it is unusual, but who cares? Do you?"

"No, I don't," said Annie. They leaned together over the yellow cat and kissed each other.

"But what an absurd minister's wife I shall be," said Annie. "To think of your marrying a girl who has staid at home from church and played cards with her grandmother!"

"I am not at all sure," said Von Rosen, "that you do not get more benefit, more spiritual benefit, than you would have done from my sermons."

"I think," said Annie, "that you are just about as funny a minister as I shall be a minister's wife."

"I never thought I should be married at all."

"Why not?"

"I did not care for women."

"Then why do you now?"

"Because you are a woman."

Then there was a sudden movement in front of them. The leaf-shadows flickered; the cat jumped down from Annie's lap and ran away, his great yellow plume of tail waving angrily, and Margaret Edes stood before them. She was faultlessly dressed as usual. A woman of her type cannot be changed utterly by force of circumstances in a short time. Her hat was loaded with wisteria. She wore a wisteria gown of soft wool. She held up her skirts daintily. A great amethyst gleamed at her throat, but her face, wearing a smile like a painted one, was dreadful. It was inconceivable, but Margaret Edes had actually in view the banality of confessing her sin to her minister. Of course, Annie was the one who divined her purpose. Von Rosen was simply bewildered. He rose, and stood with an air of polite attention.

"Margaret," cried Annie, "Margaret!"

The man thought that his sweetheart was simply embarrassed, because of discovery. He did not understand why she bade him peremptorily to please go in the house and see if Aunt

Harriet were awake, that she wished to speak to Mrs. Edes. He, however, went as bidden, already discovering that man is as a child to a woman when she is really in earnest.

When he was quite out of hearing, Annie turned upon her friend. "Margaret," she said, "Margaret, you must not."

Margaret turned her desperate eyes upon Annie. "I did not know it would be like this," she said.

"You must not tell him."

"I must."

"You must not, and all the more now."

"Why, now?"

"I am going to marry him."

"Then he ought to know."

"Then he ought not to know, for you have drawn me into your web of deceit also. He has talked to me about you and the book. I have not betrayed you. You cannot betray me."

"It will kill me. I did not know it would be like this. I never blamed myself for anything before."

"It will not kill you, and if it does, you must

bear it. You must not do your husband and children such an awful harm."

"Wilbur is nominated for Senator. He would have to give it up. He would go away from Fairbridge. He is very proud," said Margaret in a breathless voice, "but I must tell."

"You cannot tell."

"The children talk of it all the time. They look at me so. They wonder because they think I have written that book. They tell all the other children. Annie, I must confess to somebody. I did not know it would be like this."

"You cannot confess to anybody except God," said Annie.

"I cannot tell my husband. I cannot tell poor Wilbur, but I thought Mr. von Rosen would tell him."

"You can not tell Mr. von Rosen. You have done an awful wrong, and now you can not escape the fact that you have done it. You cannot get away from it."

"You are so hard."

"No, I am not hard," said Annie. "I did not

betray you there before them all, and neither did Alice."

"Did Alice Mendon know?" asked Margaret in an awful voice.

"Yes, I had told Alice. She was so hurt for me that I think she might have told."

"Then she may tell now. I will go to her."

"She will not tell now. And I am not hard. It is you who are hard upon yourself and that nobody, least of all I, can help. You will have to know this dreadful thing of yourself all your life and you can never stop blaming yourself. There is no way out of it. You can not ruin your husband. You can not ruin your children's future and you cannot, after the wrong you have done me, put me in the wrong, as you would do if you told. By telling the truth, you would put me to the lie, when I kept silence for your sake and the sakes of your husband and children."

"I did not know it would be like this," said Margaret in her desperate voice. "I had done nothing worth doing all my life and the hunger to do something had tormented me. It seemed easy, I did not know how I could blame myself.

I have always thought so well of myself; I did not know. Annie, for God's sake, let me tell. You can't know how keenly I suffer, Annie. Let me tell Mr. von Rosen. People always tell ministers. Even if he does not tell Wilbur, but perhaps he can tell him and soften it, it would be a relief. People always tell ministers, Annie."

It seemed improbable that Margaret Edes in her wisteria costume could be speaking. Annie regarded her with almost horror. She pitied her, yet she could not understand. Margaret had done something of which she herself was absolutely incapable. She had the right to throw the stone. She looked at a sinner whose sin was beyond her comprehension. She pitied the evident signs of distress, but her pity, although devoid of anger, was, in spite of herself, coldly wondering. Moreover, Margaret had been guilty in the eyes of the girl of a much worse sin than the mere thievery of her book; she had murdered love. Annie had loved Margaret greatly. No, she loved her no longer, since the older woman had actually blasphemed against the goddess whom the girl had shrined.

Had Margaret stolen from another, it would have made no difference. The mere act had destroyed herself as an image of love. Annie, especially now that she was so happy, cared nothing for the glory of which she had been deprived. She had, in truth, never had much hunger for fame, especially for herself. She did not care when she thought how pleased her lover would have been and her relatives, but already the plan for another book was in her brain, for the child was a creator, and no blow like this had any lasting power over her work. What she considered was Margaret's revelation of herself as something else than Margaret, and what she did resent bitterly was being forced into deception in order to shield her. She was in fact hard, although she did not know it. Her usually gentle nature had become like adamant before this. She felt unlike herself as she said bitterly:

"People do not always tell ministers, and you cannot tell Mr. von Rosen, Margaret. I forbid it. Go home and keep still."

"I cannot bear it."

"You must bear it."

"They are going to give me a dinner, the Zenith Club," said Margaret.

"You will have to accept it."

"I cannot, Annie Eustace, of what do you think me capable? I am not as bad as you think. I cannot and will not accept that dinner and make the speech which they will expect and hear all the congratulations which they will offer. I cannot."

"You must accept the dinner, but I don't see that you need make the speech," said Annie, who was herself aghast over such extremity of torture.

"I will not," said Margaret. She was very pale and her lips were a tight line. Her eyes were opaque and lustreless. She was in reality suffering what a less egotistical nature could not even imagine. All her life had Margaret Edes worshipped and loved Margaret Edes. Now she had done an awful thing. The falling from the pedestal of a friend is nothing to hurling oneself from one's height of self-esteem and that she had done. She stood, as it were, over the horrible body of her once

beautiful and adored self. She was not actually remorseful and that made it all the worse. She simply could not evade the dreadful glare of light upon her own imperfections; she who had always thought of herself as perfect, but the glare of knowledge came mostly from her appreciation of the attitude of her friends and lovers toward what she had done. Suppose she went home and told Wilbur. Suppose she said, "I did not write that book. My friend, Annie Eustace, wrote it. I am a thief, and worse than a thief." She knew just how he would look at her, his wife, his Margaret, who had never done wrong in his eyes. For the first time in her life she was afraid, and yet how could she live and bear such torture and not confess? Confession would be like a person ill unto death, giving up, and seeking the peace of a sick chamber and the rest of bed and the care of a physician. She had come to feel like that and yet, confession would be like a fiery torture. Margaret had in some almost insane fashion come to feel that she might confess to a minister, a man of God, and ease her soul, without more. And she had never been

religious, and would have formerly smiled in serene scorn at her own state of mind. And here was the other woman whom she had wronged, forbidding her this one little possibility of comfort.

She said again humbly, "Let me tell him, Annie. He will only think the more of you because you shielded me."

But Annie was full of scorn which Margaret could not understand since her nature was not so fine. "Do you think I wish him to?" she said, but in a whisper because she heard voices and footsteps. "You cannot tell him, Margaret."

Then Von Rosen and Aunt Harriet, whose eyes were dim with recent sleep, came in sight, and Harriet Eustace, who had not seen Margaret since the club meeting, immediately seized upon her two hands and kissed her and congratulated her.

"You dear, wonderful creature," she said, "we are all so proud of you. Fairbridge is so proud of you and as for us, we can only feel honoured that our little Annie has such a friend. We trust that she will profit by your

friendship and we realise that it is such a privilege for her."

"Thank you," said Margaret. She turned her head aside. It was rather dreadful, and Annie realised it.

Von Rosen stood by smiling. "I am glad to join in the congratulations," he said. "In these days of many books, it is a great achievement to have one singled out for special notice. I have not yet had the pleasure of reading the book, but shall certainly have it soon."

"Thank you," said Margaret again.

"She should give you an autograph copy," said Harriet Eustace.

"Yes," said Margaret. She drew aside Annie and whispered, "I shall tell my husband then. I shall."

Then she bade them good afternoon in her usually graceful way; murmured something about a little business which she had with Annie and flitted down the pergola in a cloud of wisteria.

"It does seem wonderful," said Harriet Eustace, "that she should have written that book."

Von Rosen glanced at Annie with an inquiring expression. He wondered whether she wished him to announce their engagement to her aunt. The amazing suddenness of it all had begun to daunt him. He was in considerable doubt as to what Miss Harriet Eustace, who was a most conservative lady, who had always done exactly the things which a lady under similar circumstances might be expected to do, who always said the things to be expected, would say to this, which must, of course, savour very much of the unexpected. Von Rosen was entirely sure that Miss Harriet Eustace would be scarcely able to conceive of a marriage engagement of her niece especially with a clergyman without all the formal preliminaries of courtship, and he knew well that preliminaries had hardly existed, in the usual sense of the term. He felt absurdly shy, and he was very much relieved when finally Miss Harriet and Annie took their leave and he had said nothing about the engagement. Miss Harriet said a great deal about his most interesting and improving collection. She was a woman of a patronising

turn of mind and she made Von Rosen feel like a little boy.

"I especially appreciate the favour for the sake of my niece," she said. "It is so desirable for the minds of the young to be improved." Von Rosen murmured a polite acquiescence. She had spoken of his tall, lovely girl as if she were in short skirts. Miss Harriet continued:

"When I consider what Mrs. Edes has done," she said,—"written a book which has made her famous, I realise how exceedingly important it is for the minds of the young to be improved. It is good for Annie to know Mrs. Edes so intimately, I think."

For the first time poor Annie was conscious of a distinct sense of wrath. Here she herself had written that book and her mind, in order to have written it, must be every whit as improved as Margaret Edes' and her Aunt Harriet was belittling her before her lover. It was a struggle to maintain silence, especially as her aunt went on talking in a still more exasperating manner.

"I always considered Mrs. Wilbur Edes as

a very unusual woman," said she, "but of course, this was unexpected. I am so thankful that Annie has the great honour of her friendship. Of course, Annie can never do what Mrs. Edes has done. She herself knows that she lacks talent and also concentration. Annie, you know you have never finished that daisy centre piece which you begun surely six months ago. I am quite sure that Mrs. Edes would have finished it in a week."

Annie did lose patience at that. "Margaret just loathes fancy work, Aunt Harriet," said she. "She would never even have begun that centre piece."

"It is much better never to begin a piece of work than never to finish it," replied Aunt Harriet, "and Mrs. Edes, my dear, has been engaged in much more important work. If you had written a book which had made you famous, no one could venture to complain of your lack of industry with regard to the daisy centre piece. But I am sure that Mrs. Edes, in order to have written that book of which everybody is talking, must have displayed much industry and concentration in all the minor matters of

life. I think you must be mistaken, my dear. I am quite sure that Mrs. Edes has not neglected work."

Annie made no rejoinder, but her aunt did not seem to notice it.

"I am so thankful, Mr. von Rosen," said she, "that my niece has the honour of being counted among the friends of such a remarkable woman. May I inquire if Mrs. Edes has ever seen your really extraordinary collection, Mr. von Rosen."

"No, she has not seen it," replied Von Rosen, and he looked annoyed. Without in the least understanding the real trend of the matter, he did not like to hear his sweetheart addressed after such a fashion, even though he had no inkling of the real state of affairs. To his mind, this exquisite little Annie, grimy daisy centre piece and all, had accomplished much more in simply being herself, than had Margaret Edes with her much blazoned book.

"I trust that she will yet see it," said Miss Harriet Eustace. Harriet Eustace was tall, dull skinned and wide mouthed, and she had a fashion, because she had been told from childhood

that her mouth was wide, of constantly puckering it as if she were eating alum.

"I shall be of course pleased to show Mrs. Edes my collection at any time," said Von Rosen politely.

"I hope she will see it," said Harriet, puckering, "it is so improving, and if anything is improving to the ordinary mind, what must it be to the mind of genius?"

The two took leave then, Annie walking behind her aunt. The sidewalk which was encroached upon by grass was very narrow. Annie did not speak at all. She heard her aunt talking incessantly without realising the substance of what she said. Her own brain was overwhelmed with bewilderment and happiness. Here was she, Annie Eustace, engaged to be married and to the right man. The combination was astounding. Annie had been conscious ever since she had first seen him, that Karl von Rosen dwelt at the back of her thoughts, but she was rather a well disciplined girl. She had not allowed herself the luxury of any dreams concerning him and herself. She had not considered the possibility of his

caring for her, not because she underestimated herself, but because she overestimated him. Now, she knew he cared, he cared, and he wanted to marry her, to make her his wife. After she had reached home, when they were seated at the tea table, she did not think of telling anybody. She ate and felt as if she were in a blissful crystal sphere of isolation. It did not occur to her to reveal her secret until she went into her grandmother's room rather late to bid her good night. Annie had been sitting by herself on the front piazza and allowing herself a perfect feast in future air-castles. She could see from where she sat, the lights from the windows of the Edes' house, and she heard Wilbur's voice, and now and then his laugh. Margaret's voice, she never heard at all. Annie went into the chamber, the best in the house, and there lay her grandmother, old Ann Maria Eustace, propped up in bed, reading a novel which was not allowed in the Fairbridge library. She had bidden Annie buy it for her, when she last went to New York.

"I wouldn't ask a girl to buy such a book," the old lady had said, "but nobody will know

you and I have read so many notices about its wickedness, I want to see it for myself."

Now she looked up when Annie entered. "It is not wicked at all," she said in rather a disappointed tone. "It is much too dull. In order to make a book wicked, it must be, at least, somewhat entertaining. The writer speaks of wicked things, but in such a very moral fashion that it is all like a sermon. I don't like the book at all. At the same time a girl like you had better not read it and you had better see that Harriet and Susan don't get a glimpse of it. They would be set into fits. It is a strange thing that both my daughters should be such old maids to the bone and marrow. You can read it though if you wish, Annie. I doubt if you understand the wickedness anyway, and I don't want you to grow up straight-laced like Harriet and Susan. It is really a misfortune. They lose a lot."

Then Annie spoke. "I shall not be an old maid, I think," said she. "I am going to be married."

"Married! Who is going to marry you? I haven't seen a man in this house except the

doctor and the minister for the last twenty years."

"I am going to marry the minister, Mr. von Rosen."

"Lord," said Annie's grandmother, and stared at her. She was a queer looking old lady propped up on a flat pillow with her wicked book. She had removed the front-piece which she wore by day and her face showed large and rosy between the frills of her night cap. Her china blue eyes were exceedingly keen and bright. Her mouth as large as her daughter Harriet's, not puckered at all, but frankly open in an alarming slit, in her amazement.

"When for goodness sake has the man courted you?" she burst forth at last.

"I don't know."

"Well, I don't know, if you don't. You haven't been meeting him outside the house. No, you have not. You are a lady, if you have been brought up by old maids, who tell lies about spades."

"I did not know until this afternoon," said Annie. "Mr. von Rosen and I went out to see his rose-garden, while Aunt Harriet—"

Then the old lady shook the bed with mirth.

"I see," said she. "Harriet is scared to death of roses and she went to sleep in the house and you got your chance. Good for you. I am thankful the Eustace family won't quite sputter out in old maids." The old lady continued to chuckle. Annie feared lest her aunts might hear. Beside the bed stood a table with the collection of things which was Ann Maria Eustace's nightly requirement. There were a good many things. First was a shaded reading lamp, then a candle and a matchbox; there was a plate of thin bread and butter carefully folded in a napkin. A glass of milk, covered with a glass dish; two bottles of medicine; two spoons; a saucer of sugared raspberries; exactly one square inch of American cheese on a tiny plate; a pitcher of water, carefully covered; a tumbler; a glass of port wine and a bottle of camphor. Old Ann Maria Eustace took most of her sustenance at night. Night was really her happy time. When that worn, soft old bulk of hers was ensconsed among her soft pillows and feather bed and she had her eatables and drinkables and literature at hand, she was

in her happiest mood and she was none the less happy from the knowledge that her daughters considered that any well conducted old woman should have beside her bed, merely a stand with a fair linen cloth, a glass of water, a candle and the Good Book, and that if she could not go immediately to sleep, she should lie quietly and say over texts and hymns to herself. All Ann Maria's spice of life was got from a hidden antagonism to her daughters and quietly flying in the face of their prejudices, and she was the sort of old lady who could hardly have lived at all without spice.

"Your Aunt Harriet will be hopping," said the perverse old lady with another chuckle.

"Why, grandmother?"

"Harriet has had an eye on him herself."

Annie gasped. "Aunt Harriet must be at least twenty-five years older," said she.

"Hm," said the old lady, "that doesn't amount to anything. Harriet didn't put on her pearl breast-pin and crimp her hair unless she had something in her mind. Susan has given up, but Harriet hasn't given up."

Annie still looked aghast.

"When are you going to get married?" asked the old lady.

"I don't know."

"Haven't settled that yet? Well, when you do, there's the white satin embroidered with white roses that I was married in and my old lace veil. I think he's a nice young man. All I have against him is his calling. You will have to go to meeting whether you want to or not and listen to the same man's sermons. But he is good looking and they say he has money, and anyway, the Eustaces won't peter out in old maids. There's one thing I am sorry about. Sunday is going to be a pretty long day for me, after you are married, and I suppose before. If you are going to marry that man, I suppose you will have to begin going to meeting at once."

Then Annie spoke decidedly. "I am always going to play pinocle with you Sunday forenoons as long as you live, grandmother," said she.

"After you are married?"

"Yes, I am."

"After you are married to a minister?"

"Yes, grandmother."

The old lady sat up straight and eyed Annie with her delighted china blue gaze.

"Mr. von Rosen is a lucky man," said she. "Enough sight luckier than he knows. You are just like me, Annie Eustace, and your grandfather set his eyes by me as long as he lived. A good woman who has sense enough not to follow all the rules and precepts and keep good, isn't found every day, and she can hold a man and holding a man is about as tough a job as the Almighty ever set a woman. I've got a pearl necklace and a ring in the bank. Harriet has always wanted them but what is the use of a born old maid decking herself out? I always knew Harriet and Susan would be old maids. Why, they would never let their doll-babies be seen without all their clothes on, seemed to think there was something indecent about cotton cloth legs stuffed with sawdust. When you see a little girl as silly as that you can always be sure she is cut out for an old maid. I don't care when you get married—just as soon as you want to—and you shall have a pretty wedding and you shall

have your wedding cake made after my old recipe. You are a good girl, Annie. You look like me. You are enough sight better than you would be if you were better, and you can make what you can out of that. Now, you must go to bed. You haven't told Harriet and Susan yet, have you?"

"No, grandmother."

"I'll tell them myself in the morning," said the old lady with a chuckle which made her ancient face a mask of mirth and mischief. "Now, you run along and go to bed. This book is dull, but I want to see how wicked the writer tried to make it and the heroine is just making an awful effort to run away with a married man. She won't succeed, but I want to see how near she gets to it. Good-night, Annie. You can have the book to-morrow."

Annie went to her own room but she made no preparation for bed. She had planned to work as she had worked lately until nearly morning. She was hurrying to complete another book which she had begun before Margaret Edes' announcement that she had written *The Poor Lady*. The speedy completion of this book had

been the condition of secrecy with her publishers. However, Annie, before she lit the lamp on her table could not resist the desire to sit for a minute beside her window and gaze out upon the lovely night and revel in her wonderful happiness. The night was lovely enough for anyone, and for a girl in the rapture of her first love, it was as beautiful as heaven. The broad village gleaming like silver in the moonlight satisfied her as well as a street of gold and the tree shadows waved softly over everything like wings of benediction. Sweet odours came in her face. She could see the soft pallor of a clump of lilies in the front yard. The shrilling of the night insects seemed like the calls of prophets of happiness. The lights had gone out of the windows of the Edes' house, but suddenly she heard a faint, very faint, but very terrible cry and a white figure rushed out of the Edes' gate. Annie did not wait a second. She was up, out of her room, sliding down the stair banisters after the habit of her childhood and after it.

CHAPTER IX

Margaret Edes, light and slender and supple as she was, and moreover rendered swift with the terrible spur of hysteria, was no match for Annie Eustace who had the build of a racing human, being long-winded and limber. Annie caught up with her, just before they reached Alice Mendon's house, and had her held by one arm. Margaret gave a stifled shriek. Even in hysteria, she did not quite lose her head. She had unusual self-control.

"Let me go," she gasped. Annie saw that Margaret carried a suit-case, which had probably somewhat hindered her movements. "Let me go, I shall miss the ten-thirty train," Margaret said in her breathless voice.

"Where are you going?"

"I am going."

"Where?"

"Anywhere,—away from it all."

The two struggled together as far as Alice's gate, and to Annie's great relief, a tall figure

appeared, Alice herself. She opened the gate and came on Margaret's other side.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"I am going to take the ten-thirty train," said Margaret.

"Where are you going?"

"To New York."

"Where in New York?"

"I am going."

"You are not going," said Alice Mendon; "you will return quietly to your own home like a sensible woman. You are running away, and you know it."

"Yes, I am," said Margaret in her desperate voice. "You would run away if you were in my place, Alice Mendon."

"I could never be in your place," said Alice, "but if I were, I should stay and face the situation." She spoke with quite undisguised scorn and yet with pity.

"You must think of your husband and children and not entirely of yourself," she added.

"If," said Margaret, stammering as she spoke, "I tell Wilbur, I think it will kill him. If I tell the children, they will never really

have a mother again. They will never forget. But if I do not tell, I shall not have myself. It is a horrible thing not to have yourself, Alice Mendon."

"It is the only way."

"It is easy for you to talk, Alice Mendon. You have never been tempted."

"No," replied Alice, "that is quite true. I have never been tempted because—I cannot be tempted."

"It is no credit to you. You were made so."

"Yes, that is true also. I was made so. It is no credit to me."

Margaret tried to wrench her arm free from Annie's grasp.

"Let me go, Annie Eustace," she said. "I hate you."

"I don't care if you do," replied Annie. "I don't love you any more myself. I don't hate you, but I certainly don't love you."

"I stole your laurels," said Margaret, and she seemed to snap out the words.

"You could have had the laurels," said Annie, "without stealing, if I could have given

them to you. It is not the laurels that matter. It is you."

"I will kill myself if it ever is known," said Margaret in a low horrified whisper. She cowered.

"It will never be known unless you yourself tell it," said Annie.

"I cannot tell," said Margaret. "I have thought it all over. I canot tell and yet, how can I live and not tell?"

"I suppose," said Alice Mendon, "that always when people do wrong, they have to endure punishment. I suppose that is your punishment, Margaret. You have always loved yourself and now you will have to despise yourself. I don't see any way out of it."

"I am not the only woman who does such things," said Margaret, and there was defiance in her tone.

"No doubt, you have company," said Alice. "That does not make it easier for you." Alice, large and fair in her white draperies, towered over Margaret Edes like an embodied conscience. She was almost unendurable, like the ideal of which the other woman had fallen

short. Her mere presence was maddening. Margaret actually grimaced at her.

"It is easy for you to preach," said she, "very easy, Alice Mendon. You have not a nerve in your whole body. You have not an ungratified ambition. You neither love nor hate yourself, or other people. You want nothing on earth enough to make the lack of it disturb you."

"How well you read me," said Alice and she smiled a large calm smile as a statue might smile, could she relax her beautiful marble mouth.

"And as for Annie Eustace," said Margaret, "she has what I stole, and she knows it, and that is enough for her. Oh, both of you look down upon me and I know it."

"I look down upon you no more than I have always done," said Alice; but Annie was silent because she could not say that truly.

"Yes, I know you have always looked down upon me, Alice Mendon," said Margaret, "and you never had reason."

"I had the reason," said Alice, "that your own deeds have proved true."

"You could not know that I would do such a thing. I did not know it myself. Why, I never knew that Annie Eustace could write a book."

"I knew that a self-lover could do anything and everything to further her own ends," said Alice in her inexorable voice, which yet contained an undertone of pity.

She pitied Margaret far more than Annie could pity her for she had not loved her so much. She felt the little arm tremble in her clasp and her hand tightened upon it as a mother's might have done.

"Now, we have had enough of this," said she, "quite enough. Margaret, you must positively go home at once. I will take your suitcase, and return it to you to-morrow. I shall be out driving. You can get in without being seen, can't you?"

"I tell you both, I am going," said Margaret; "I cannot face what is before me."

"All creation has to face what is before. Running makes no difference," said Alice. "You will meet it at the end of every mile. Margaret Edes, go home. Take care of your

husband, and your children and keep your secret and let it tear you for your own good."

"They are to nominate Wilbur for Senator," said Margaret. "If they knew, if he knew, Wilbur would not run. He has always had ambition. I should kill it."

"You will not kill it," said Alice. "Here, give me that suit-case, I will set it inside the gate here. Now Annie and I will walk with you and you must steal in and not wake anybody and go to bed and to sleep."

"To sleep," repeated Margaret bitterly.

"Then not to sleep, but you must go."

The three passed down the moon-silvered road. When they had reached Margaret's door, Alice suddenly put an arm around her and kissed her.

"Go in as softly as you can, and to bed," she whispered.

"What made you do that, Alice?" asked Annie in a small voice when the door had closed behind Margaret.

"I think I am beginning to love her," whispered Alice. "Now you know what we must do, Annie?"

"What?"

"We must both watch until dawn, until after that train to New York which stops here at three-thirty. You must stand here and I will go to the other door. Thank God, there are only two doors, and I don't think she will try the windows because she won't suspect our being here. But I don't trust her, poor thing. She is desperate. You stay here, Annie. Sit down close to the door and—you won't be afraid?"

"Oh, no!"

"Of course, there is nothing to be afraid of," said Alice. "Now I will go to the other door."

Annie sat there until the moon sank. She did not feel in the least sleepy. She sat there and counted up her joys of life and almost forgot poor Margaret who had trampled hers in the dust raised by her own feet of self-seeking. Then came the whistle and roar of a train and Alice stole around the house.

"It is safe enough for us to go now," said she. "That was the last train. Do you think you can get in your house without waking anybody?"

"There is no danger unless I wake grandmother. She wakes very early of herself and she may not be asleep and her hearing is very quick.

"What will she say?"

"I think I can manage her."

"Well, we must hurry. It is lucky that my room is away from the others or I should not be sure of getting there unsuspected. Hurry, Annie."

The two sped swiftly and noiselessly down the street, which was now very dark. The village houses seemed rather awful with their dark windows like sightless eyes. When they reached Annie's house Alice gave her a swift kiss. "Good-night," she whispered.

"Alice."

"Well, little Annie?"

"I am going to be married, to Mr. Von Rosen."

Alice started ever so slightly. "You are a lucky girl," she whispered, "and he is a lucky man."

Alice flickered out of sight down the street like a white moonbeam and Annie stole into

the house. She dared not lock the door behind her lest she arouse somebody. She tip-toed upstairs, but as she was passing her grandmother's door, it was opened, and the old woman stood there, her face lit by her flaring candle.

"You just march right in here," said she so loud that Annie shuddered for fear she would arouse the whole house. She followed her grandmother into her room and the old woman turned and looked at her, and her face was white.

"Where have you been, Miss?" said she. "It is after three o'clock in the morning."

"I had to go, grandmother, and there was no harm, but I can't tell you. Indeed, I can't," replied Annie, trembling.

"Why can't you? I'd like to know."

"I can't, indeed, I can't, grandmother."

"Why not, I'd like to know. Pretty doings, I call it."

"I can't tell you why not, grandmother."

The old woman eyed the girl. "Out with a man—I don't care if you are engaged to him —till this time!" said she.

Annie started and crimsoned. "Oh, grandmother!" she cried.

"I don't care if he is a minister. I am going to see him to-morrow, no, to-day, right after breakfast and give him a piece of my mind. I don't care what he thinks of me."

"Grandmother, there wasn't any man."

"Are you telling me the truth?"

"I always tell the truth."

"Yes, I think you always have since that time when you were a little girl and I spanked you for lying," said the old woman. "I rather think you do tell the truth, but sometimes when a girl gets a man into her head, she goes round like a top. You haven't been alone, you needn't tell me that."

"No, I haven't been alone."

"But, he wasn't with you? There wasn't any man?"

"No, there was not any man, grandmother."

"Then you had better get into your own room as fast as you can and move still or you will wake up Harriet and Susan."

Annie went.

"I am thankful I am not curious," said the

old woman clambering back into bed. She lit her lamp and took up her novel again.

The next morning old Ann Maria Eustace announced her granddaughter's engagement at the breakfast table. She waited until the meal was in full swing, then she raised her voice.

"Well, girls," she said, looking first at Harriet, then at Susan, "I have some good news for you. Our little Annie here is too modest, so I have to tell you for her."

Harriet Eustace laughed unsuspiciously. "Don't tell us that Annie has been writing a great anonymous novel like Margaret Edes," she said, and Susan laughed also. "Whatever news it may be, it is not that," she said. "Nobody could suspect Annie of writing a book. I myself was not so much surprised at Margaret Edes."

To Annie's consternation, her grandmother turned upon her a long, slow, reading look. She flushed under it and swallowed a spoonful of cereal hastily. Then her grandmother chuckled under her breath and her china blue eyes twinkled.

"Annie has done something a deal better

than to write a book," said she, looking away from the girl, and fixing unsparing eyes upon her daughters. "She has found a nice man to marry her."

Harriet and Susan dropped their spoons and stared at their mother.

"Mother, what are you talking about?" said Harriet sharply. "She has had no attention."

"Sometimes," drawled the old lady in a way she affected when she wished to be exasperating, "sometimes, a little attention is so strong that it counts and sometimes attention is attention when nobody thinks it is."

"Who is it?" asked Harriet in rather a hard voice. Susan regarded Annie with a bewildered, yet kindly smile. Poor Susan had never regarded the honey pots of life as intended for herself, and thus could feel a kindly interest in their acquisition by others.

"My granddaughter is engaged to be married to Mr. von Rosen," said the old lady. Then she stirred her coffee assiduously.

Susan rose and kissed Annie. "I hope you will be happy, very happy," she said in an awed voice. Harriet rose, to follow her sis-

ter's example but she looked viciously at her mother.

"He is a good ten years older than Annie," she said.

"And a good twenty-five younger than you," said the old lady, and sipped her coffee delicately. "He is just the right age for Annie."

Harriet kissed Annie, but her lips were cold and Annie wondered. It never occurred to her then, nor later, to imagine that her Aunt Harriet might have had her own dreams which had never entirely ended in rainbow mists. She did not know how hardly dreams die. They are sometimes not entirely stamped out during a long lifetime.

That evening Von Rosen came to call on Annie and she received him alone in the best parlour. She felt embarrassed and shy, but very happy. Her lover brought her an engagement ring, a great pearl, which had been his mother's and put it on her finger, and Annie eyed her finger with a big round gaze like a bird's. Von Rosen laughed at the girl holding up her hand and staring at the beringed finger.

"Don't you like it, dear?" he said.

"It is the most beautiful ring I ever saw," said Annie, "but I keep thinking it may not be true."

"The truest things in the world are the things which do not seem so," he said, and caught up the slender hand and kissed the ring and the finger.

Margaret on the verandah had seen Von Rosen enter the Eustace house and had guessed dully at the reason. She had always thought that Von Rosen would eventually marry Alice Mendon and she wondered a little, but not much. Her own affairs were entirely sufficient to occupy her mind. Her position had become more impossible to alter and more ghastly. That night Wilbur had brought home a present to celebrate her success. It was something which she had long wanted and which she knew he could ill afford:—a circlet of topazes for her hair. She kissed him and put it on to please him, but it was to her as if she were crowned because of her infamy and she longed to snatch the thing off and trample it. And yet always she was well aware that it was not remorse which she felt, but a miserable humilia-

tion that she, Margaret Edes, should have cause for remorse. The whole day had been hideous. The letters and calls of congratulation had been incessant. There were brief notices in a few papers which had been marked and sent to her and Wilbur had brought them home also. Her post-office box had been crammed. There were requests for her autograph. There were requests for aid from charitable institutions. There were requests for advice and assistance from young authors. She had two packages of manuscripts sent her for inspection concerning their merits. One was a short story, and came through the mail; one was a book and came by express. She had requests for work from editors and publishers. Wilbur had brought a letter of congratulation from his partner. It was absolutely impossible for her to draw back except for that ignoble reason: the reinstatement of herself in her own esteem. She could not possibly receive all this undeserved adulation and retain her self esteem. It was all more than she had counted upon. She had opened Pandora's box with a vengeance and the stinging things swarmed over

her. Wilbur sat on the verandah with her and scarcely took his eyes of adoring wonder from her face. She had sent the little girls to bed early. They had told all their playmates and talked incessantly with childish bragging. They seemd to mock her as with peacock eyes, symbolic of her own vanity.

"You sent the poor little things to bed very early," Wilbur said. "They did so enjoy talking over their mother's triumph. It is the greatest day of their lives, you know, Margaret."

"I am tired of it," Margaret said sharply, but Wilbur's look of worship deepened.

"You are so modest, sweetheart," he said and Margaret writhed. Poor Wilbur had been reading *The Poor Lady* instead of his beloved newspapers and now and then he quoted a passage which he remembered, with astonishing accuracy.

"Say, darling, you are a marvel," he would remark after every quotation. "Now, how in the world did you ever manage to think that up? I suppose just this minute, as you sit there looking so sweet in your white dress, just

such things are floating through your brain, eh?"

"No, they are not," replied Margaret. Oh, if she had only understood the horrible depth of a lie!

"Suppose Von Rosen is making up to little Annie?" said Wilbur presently.

"I don't know."

"Well, she is a nice little thing, sweet tempered, and pretty, although of course her mental calibre is limited. She may make a good wife, though. A man doesn't expect his wife always to set the river on fire as you have done, sweetheart."

Then Wilbur fished from his pockets a lot of samples. "Thought I must order a new suit, to live up to my wife," he said. "See which you prefer, Margaret."

"I should think your own political outlook would make the new suit necessary," said Margaret tartly.

"Not a bit of it. Get more votes if you look a bit shabby from the sort who I expect may get me the office," laughed Wilbur. "This new suit is simply to enable me to look worthy,

as far as my clothes are concerned, of my famous wife."

"I think you have already clothes enough," said Margaret coldly.

Wilbur looked hurt. "Doesn't make much difference how the old man looks, does it, dear?" said he.

"Let me see the samples," Margaret returned with an effort. There were depths beyond depths; there were bottomless quicksands in a lie. How could she have known?

That night Wilbur looked into his wife's bedroom at midnight. "Awake?" he asked in his monosyllabic fashion.

"Yes."

"Say, old girl, Von Rosen has just this minute gone. Guess it's a match fast enough."

"I always thought it would be Alice," returned Margaret wearily. Love affairs did seem so trivial to her at this juncture.

"Alice Mendon has never cared a snap about getting married any way," returned Wilbur. "Some women are built that way. She is."

Margaret did not inquire how he knew. If Wilbur had told her that he had himself asked

Alice in marriage, it would have been as if she had not heard. All such things seemed very unimportant to her in the awful depths of her lie. She said good-night in answer to Wilbur's and again fell to thinking. There was no way out, absolutely no way. She must live and die with this secret self-knowledge which abased her, gnawing at the heart. Wilbur had told her that he believed that her authorship of *The Poor Lady* might be the turning point of his election. She was tongue-tied in a horrible spiritual sense. She was disfigured for the rest of her life and she could never once turn away her eyes from her disfigurement.

The light from Annie Eustace's window shone in her room for two hours after that. She wondered what she was doing and guessed Annie was writing a new novel to take the place of the one of which she had robbed her. An acute desire which was like a pain to be herself the injured instead of the injurer possessed her. Oh, what would it mean to be Annie sitting there, without leisure to brood over her new happiness, working, working, into the morning hours and have nothing to look upon except

moral and physical beauty in her mental looking-glass. She envied the poor girl, who was really working beyond her strength, as she had never envied any human being. The envy stung her, and she could not sleep. The next morning she looked ill and then she had to endure Wilbur's solicitude.

"Poor girl, you overworked writing your splendid book," he said. Then he suggested that she spend a month at an expensive seashore resort and another horror was upon Margaret. Wilbur, she well knew, could not afford to send her to such a place, but was innocently, albeit rather shamefacedly, assuming that she could defray her own expenses from the revenue of her book. He would never call her to account as to what she had done with the wealth which he supposed her to be reaping. She was well aware of that, but he would naturally wonder within himself. Any man would. She said that she was quite well, that she hated a big hotel, and much preferred home during the hot season, but she heard the roar of these new breakers. How could she have dreamed of the lifelong disturbance which a lie could cause?

Night after night she saw the light in Annie's windows and she knew what she was doing. She knew why she was not to be married until next winter. That book had to be written first. Poor Annie could not enjoy her romance to the full because of over-work. The girl lost flesh and Margaret knew why. Preparing one's trousseau, living in a love affair, and writing a book, are rather strenuous, when undertaken at the same time.

It was February when Annie and Von Rosen were married and the wedding was very quiet. Annie had over-worked, but her book was published, and was out-selling *The Poor Lady.* It also was published anonymously, but Margaret knew, she knew even from the reviews. Then she bought the book and read it and was convinced. The book was really an important work. The writer had gone far beyond her first flight, but there was something unmistakable about the style to such a jealous reader as Margaret. Annie had her success after all. She wore her laurels, although unseen of men, with her orange blossoms. Margaret saw in every paper, in great headlines, the notice of

the great seller. The best novel for a twelvemonth—*The Firm Hand.* Wilbur talked much about it. He had his election. He was a Senator, and was quietly proud of it, but nothing mattered to him as much as Margaret's book. That meant more than his own success.

"I have read that novel they are talking so much about and it cannot compare with yours," he told her. "The publishers ought to push yours a little more. Do you think I ought to look in on them and have a little heart-to-heart talk?"

Margaret's face was ghastly. "Don't do anything of the sort," she said.

"Well, I won't if you don't want me to, but—"

"I most certainly don't want you to." Then Margaret never had a day of peace. She feared lest Wilbur, who seemed nightly more incensed at the flaming notices of *The Firm Hand* might, in spite of her remonstrances, go to see the publishers, and would they keep the secret if he did?

Margaret continued to live as she had done before. That was part of the horror. She

dared not resign from the Zenith Club. However, she came in time to get a sort of comfort from it. Meeting all those members, presiding over the meetings, became a sort of secret flagellation, which served as a counter irritation, for her tormented soul. All those women thought well of her. They admired her. The acute torture which she derived from her knowledge of herself, as compared with their opinion of her, seemed at times to go a little way toward squaring her account with her better self. And the club also seemd to rouse within her a keener vitality of her better self. Especially when the New Year came and Mrs. Slade was elected president in her stead. Once, Margaret would have been incapable of accepting that situation so gracefully. She gave a reception to Mrs. Slade in honour of her election, and that night had a little return of her lost peace. Then during one of the meetings, a really good paper was read, which set her thinking. That evening she played dominoes with Maida and Adelaide, and always after that a game followed dinner. The mother became intimate with her children. She really loved

them because of her loss of love for herself and because the heart must hold love. She loved her husband too, but he realised no difference because he had loved her. That coldness had had no headway against such doting worship. But the children realised.

"Mamma is so much better since she wrote that book that I shall be glad when you are old enough to write a book too," Adelaide said once to Maida.

But always Margaret suffered horribly, although she gave no sign. She took care of her beauty. She was more particular than ever about her dress. She entertained, she accepted every invitation, and they multiplied since Wilbur's flight in politics and her own reputed authorship. She was Spartan in her courage but she suffered, because she saw herself as she was and she had so loved herself. It was not until Annie Eustace was married that she obtained the slightest relief. Then she ascertained that the friend whom she had robbed of her laurels had obtained a newer and greener crown of them. She went to the wedding and saw on a table, Annie's new book. She glanced

at it and she knew and she wondered if Von Rosen knew. He did not.

Annie waited until after their return from their short wedding journey when they were settled in their home. Then one evening, seated with her husband before the fire in the study, with the yellow cat in her lap, and the bull terrier on the rug, his white skin rosy in the firelight, she said:

"Karl, I have something to tell you."

Von Rosen looked lovingly at her. "Well, dear?"

"It is nothing, only you must not tell, for the publishers insist upon its being anonymous, I —wrote *The Firm Hand.*"

Von Rosen made a startled exclamation and looked at Annie and she could not understand the look.

"Are you displeased?" she faltered. "Don't you like me to write? I will never neglect you or our home because of it. Indeed I will not."

"Displeased," said Von Rosen. He got up and deliberately knelt before her. "I am proud that you are my wife," he said, "prouder than I am of anything else in the world."

"Please get up, dear," said Annie, "but I am so glad, although it is really I who am proud, because I have you for my husband. I feel all covered over with peacock's eyes."

"I cannot imagine a human soul less like a peacock," said Von Rosen. He put his arms around her as he knelt, and kissed her, and the yellow cat gave an indignant little snarl and jumped down. He was jealous.

"Sit down," said Annie, laughing. "I thought the time had come to tell you and I hoped you would be pleased. It is lovely, isn't it? You know it is selling wonderfully."

"It is lovely," said Von Rosen. "It would have been lovely anyway, but your success is a mighty sweet morsel for me."

"You had better go back to your chair and smoke and I will read to you," said Annie.

"Just as if you had not written a successful novel," said Von Rosen. But he obeyed, the more readily because he knew, and pride and reverence for his wife fairly dazed him. Von Rosen had been more acute than the critics and Annie had written at high pressure, and one can go over a book a thousand times and be

blind to things which should be seen. She had repeated one little sentence which she had written in *The Poor Lady.* Von Rosen knew, but he never told her that he knew. He bowed before her great, generous silence as he would have bowed before a shrine, but he knew that she had written *The Poor Lady,* and had allowed Margaret Edes to claim unquestioned the honour of her work.

As they sat there, Annie's Aunt Susan came in and sat with them. She talked a good deal about the wedding presents. Wedding presents were very wonderful to her. They were still spread out, most of them on tables in the parlour because all Fairbridge was interested in viewing them. After a while Susan went into the parlour and gloated over the presents. When she came back, she wore a slightly disgusted expression.

"You have beautiful presents," said she, "but I have been looking all around and the presents are not all on those tables, are they?"

"No," said Annie.

Von Rosen laughed. He knew what was coming, or thought that he did.

"I see," said Aunt Susan, "that you have forty-two copies of Margaret Edes' book, *The Poor Lady,* and I have always thought it was a very silly book, and you can't exchange them for every single one is autographed."

It was quite true. Poor Margaret Edes had autographed the forty-two. She had not even dreamed of the incalculable depths of a lie.

THE END

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